



# **WOMEN PHILOSOPHERS ON AUTONOMY**

**HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES**

Edited by  
Sandrine Bergès and Alberto L. Siani





# Women Philosophers on Autonomy

We encounter autonomy in virtually every area of philosophy: in its relation with rationality, personality, self-identity, authenticity, freedom, moral values and motivations, and forms of government, legal, and social institutions. At the same time, the notion of autonomy has been the subject of significant criticism. Some argue that autonomy outweighs or even endangers interpersonal or collective values, while others believe it alienates subjects who do not possess a strong form of autonomy. These marginalized subjects and communities include persons with physical or psychological disabilities, those in dire economic conditions, LGBTI persons, ethnic and religious minorities, and women in traditional communities or households.

This volume illuminates possible patterns in these criticisms of autonomy by bringing to light and critically assessing the contribution of women throughout the history of philosophy on this important subject. The essays in this collection cover a wide range of historical periods and influential female philosophers and thinkers, from medieval philosophy to contemporary debates. Important authors whose work is considered, among many others, include Hildegard of Bingen, Margaret Cavendish, Anne Conway, Mary Wollstonecraft, Susan Moller Okin, Hélène Cixous, Iris Marion Young, and Judith Jarvis Thomson. *Women Philosophers on Autonomy* will enlighten and inform contemporary debates on autonomy by bringing into the conversation previously neglected female perspectives from throughout history.

**Sandrine Bergès** is an associate professor in philosophy at Bilkent University in Ankara. Her books include: *The Routledge Companion to Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and *A Feminist Perspective on Virtue Ethics*. She also co-edited *The Social and Political Philosophy of Mary Wollstonecraft* (with Alan Coffee).

**Alberto L. Siani** is a senior researcher of Aesthetics at the Department of Civilizations and Forms of Knowledge at Università di Pisa, after being an associate professor of Philosophy at Yeditepe University, Istanbul. Among others, he published *Morte dell'arte, libertà del soggetto: Attualità di Hegel* (2017) and edited *L'estetica di Hegel* (2014, with Mario Farina).





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Perspectives

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Sandrine Bergès and Alberto L. Siani



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# Preface

The original impulse for the present volume was given in the framework of a newly established Turkish-European network for the study of women in philosophy (<http://turkish-europeanwomenphilosophers.weebly.com/>). A number of the contributions for this volume were presented at an international workshop organized by the Network in Istanbul in May 2016. Through the establishment of the network, the workshop, and the present volume, our aim was also to bring in dialogue scholars who have until now been somewhat on the margin of philosophical debates with established Western scholars, enriching their perspective on questions surrounding autonomy. The resulting volume brings forward a debate that is not only philosophically central, but also at the meeting point of diverse cultural understandings, while at the same time recovering previously largely ignored voices in this debate. Unfortunately, while we were hoping that the Network would encourage research on Turkish women philosophers, this did not happen in time for publication in this volume. This is partly a function of the fact that, prior to the 1920s, Turkish philosophers wrote in Ottoman, a language that is not commonly taught (or encouraged) in Turkish philosophy departments. However, at the time of writing, several of our members have started to discover works by Ottoman women philosophers. Hopefully, their results will be presented to the public in the near future.

Clearly, a single volume cannot take up the task of a 360-degree reexamination and reformulation of the concept of autonomy. Among the many possible strategies to restrict our focus, we have chosen the most natural one given the interests of the contributors. In fact, this volume was born at the intersection of two scientific concerns. The obvious necessity to rethink autonomy, a necessity sharpened by the fact that we were ourselves situated at the meeting point of diverse cultural understandings, was one of them. The second was the fact that our very cooperation had begun in the framework of a shared interest for the Recovery Project, that is, the project of recovering the works of women who have been ignored in standard philosophical narratives, both in research and teaching. It was then almost natural to connect these two concerns under the title “Women Philosophers on Autonomy.” This title perfectly expresses the aim we set ourselves (to



what extent we reached the aim is obviously left for the reader to evaluate!): offering a substantial contribution to the reformulation of the concept of autonomy by concentrating on what different women philosophers had to say about it. The idea was, hence, that in this way we could both address the criticism according to which autonomy is essentially a “male,” patriarchal concept and bring to light the largely ignored women contribution to this central issue of philosophy.

The editors would like to thank all the members of the Turkish-European network for the study of women in philosophy, including, of course, those who contributed to this volume, and in particular two members who have been active in disseminating the network, Ruth Hagengruber in Paderborn and Hatice Nur Erkızan in Muğla. We also would like to thank the Department of Philosophy at Yeditepe University, Istanbul, for making possible the May 2016 workshop.



# 1 Introduction

*Sandrine Bergès and Alberto L. Siani*

We encounter the notion of autonomy in virtually every area of philosophy. Its principal aspects are: autonomy in its relation with rationality, personality, self-identity, authenticity (personal autonomy), autonomy in its relation with freedom, moral values, moral motivations (moral autonomy), and autonomy in its relation with forms of government, state sovereignty, and legal and social structures and institutions (political autonomy). The three aspects are clearly interrelated, yet not reducible to one another. The omnipresence of the concept of autonomy in philosophical debates is reflected in traditional accounts of the history of Western philosophy, as autonomy constitutes an essential component of rationality, from Plato's and Aristotle's rational self-determination up to the political autonomy and perfectionism debate in contemporary liberal philosophy, passing through the Stoic notion of self-sufficiency, Spinoza's notion of adequate ideas, and Kant's moral autonomy as rooted in practical reason. When we include women philosophers in that narrative, as this volume does, the list becomes longer. And were we to make the list more diverse, including non-Western philosophers, there is no doubt that it would become even longer. This is perhaps because issues related to autonomy inform not only philosophical practice, but also everyday life. Hardly a single dimension of life can escape evaluations in terms of autonomy: psychological autonomy, economic autonomy, legal autonomy, physical autonomy, autonomy of taste, etc. Matters of autonomy may have a different resonance depending on gender, race, sexuality, and social class, but all of us struggle with them to some extent.

Nonetheless, part of the efforts to diversify philosophy has resulted in the notion of autonomy becoming subject to significant criticism. In particular, there are two major threads of dissent. The first is the thought that autonomy outweighs or even endangers interpersonal or collective values (equality, solidarity, care, etc.). The second sees autonomy as alienating or marginalizing individual or collective subjects who do not, for different reasons, benefit from a strong form of autonomy. People with physical or psychological disabilities or in dire economic conditions, single parents, women in traditional communities or households, LGBTI persons, ethnic and religious minorities, and even whole states may find the requirement



that they should aim for autonomy disconcerting or even demeaning. The quest for autonomy requires an institutional, moral, and social framework that is partly or wholly denied to a significant portion of the population, and without which autonomy is meaningless.

These criticisms have led to a widespread dissatisfaction, if not out-right skepticism, toward traditional conceptions of autonomy, beginning with the one that is perhaps most influential, namely the Kantian one. Autonomy, understood as the agent's capacity for self-legislation, is at the core of Kant's conception of practical reason. In fact, for Kant, no subject can be said to be free and morally-politically responsible unless it is based on such-conceived autonomy. Criticisms to Kant's thick version of autonomy, however, remain mostly on the margin of philosophy, in that they are often voiced by those concerned with the shortcomings of existing accounts and so belong to the realms of feminist philosophy, or applied philosophy, rather than mainstream discussion. At the same time, the mainstream discussion relies on a limited canon and rarely includes contributions from those philosophers who might have reason to question autonomy. Since, despite all criticism, autonomy seems to remain a fundamental and possibly non-dispensable concept, formulating a more sophisticated and non-exclusive version of it is a major task whose importance goes far beyond the borders of the academic debate.

There is, therefore, a strong case to be made for revisiting the concept of autonomy from a wider angle, which includes the perspectives of people who have reason to be suspicious of it. In the case of this volume, we have chosen to put forward the perspective of women philosophers. This is not meant to redress, by itself, the imbalance that can be found in the philosophical debate autonomy, but to make a start by highlighting some of the ways in which the questions of autonomy can appear different from outside the mainstream perspective. This is also an occasion to build on recent work that has been done on recovering the works of women philosophers of the past and show how their arguments fit into a debate that reaches to the 21st century in a way that nourishes and enriches the ideas presented by contemporary and past philosophers alike.

In some cases, some biographical details are necessary, both because the philosopher in question and her period or her cultural environment are not generally known, and because, in other cases, the "lived" philosophy of the author casts light on what they wrote. But the focus of this volume is primarily to engage with a specific philosophical topic these philosophers are debating from different angles, namely autonomy and the way in which philosophical discussions on this topic are or could be informed by this debate, spanning over several periods of the history of philosophy. The volume will therefore contribute both to our knowledge of women philosophers and to the inquiry on the notion of autonomy. The essays collected here aim at illuminating possible patterns of this reformulation by bringing to light and critically assessing the contribution by women philosophers throughout



the history of philosophy starting with the Medieval author Hildegard of Bingen and finishing with contemporary philosophers such as Susan Moller Okin and Martha Nussbaum. In this sense, moreover, the volume presents both historical research and contemporary perspectives (both in the “analytic” and the “continental” traditions).

As is clear, our ambition is to bridge several gaps: between women’s philosophical reflection in history and the notion of autonomy in its contemporary relevance, between past and contemporary perspectives, and between different cultural understandings, based on the diverse geographical and institutional rooting of the contributors to this volume.

One might object that there would be no need to bridge gaps in this way if the project had been more focused in the first place—if the essays had focused on questions of autonomy and equality, say, or education. But in fact, the concept of autonomy resists this sort of narrowing, especially when seen from the perspective of women philosophers. Instead of a single, universal, and eternal concept of autonomy, we see rather a concept that is always changing, a protean dynamical product of a constant effort, and not a static feature that may, by way of a binary opposition, be attributed to certain subjects (individuals or collective) and not to others. This is not meant to blur the concept of autonomy into an undistinguished mix of feelings and thoughts belonging to every subject and to no subject at all. Rather, we should emphasize the complex, multi-layered character of autonomy as something that is always on the verge of escaping our grasp. In fact, a philosophical approach to autonomy discloses from the very beginning aspects that seem to contradict not only the common-sense view of autonomy as absence of dependence on the will of other subjects, but also one another.

The aspects of autonomy that women philosophers in this volume focus on to bring out this varied multi-layered concept are numerous, but we may highlight three of them here. First of all, there is the matter of education: None of us is born an autonomous individual; rather, a long and complex process of education at the hands of other people is needed to get us there. Secondly, one may think of familial and social relationships and the role they play in developing our sense of autonomy, not only in the negative sense of an emancipation, but also in the positive sense of developing our personality, our system of preferences and needs, our life plans, etc.: in short, the various pieces of what constitutes each of us as an autonomous subject. Last, there are the institutions: Could we really be autonomous subjects if not in the framework of social and political institutions that not only guarantee our rights, but also enforce our duties?

Even the hasty naming of these three aspects complicates the view of autonomy as absence of dependence. If, among others, education, relations, and institutions play an essential role in the development of autonomy, how could we conceive of this latter in purely negative terms as a lack of ties and dependences, as a situation in which my free will is all that counts? But, on the other hand, does it make sense (and what sense?) to speak of autonomy



in a way that necessarily involves a dependence on other subjects, both individual and collective? Furthermore, we often use freedom and independence as almost equivalent with autonomy, but clearly, even though they are cognate concepts, they are not the same, and a clarification of the apparent contradictions of autonomy has to go through a clarification of its proximity and difference from those cognate concepts.

It would be unfair to expect from the essays contained in this volume a univocal, precise answer as to what autonomy should look like once we recover the women philosophers' voice. What on the contrary they manage to do, in our opinion, is to let this multi-layered character of autonomy emerge with its whole philosophical strength. They show that autonomy, both as a central philosophical concept and as a central dimension of real life, is not the result of a process of isolation and distillation, through which we create a space that is clear and separated from everything else. As a dimension of real life it is, rather, the product of a delicate balance of several, not necessarily compliant factors. As a philosophical concept, autonomy is at the meeting point of different ideas and even areas, which do not allow clear-cut responses. The reformulation our volume proposes by putting women perspectives on the proscenium is hence more precisely a series of reformulations, though not in the sense of mutually exclusive, unrelated proposals. Our hope is rather that each of the essays be considered as a possible face of autonomy and as a piece of a vivid, pluralistic discourse on it. The reader will find, in the perspectives of the philosophers here examined and in the approach of the authors of the papers, views ranging from enthusiastic re-appropriations of autonomy as a powerful emancipatory idea essential to the flourishing of women and men, to critical and skeptical evaluations of the concept, seen as yet another ideological tool or distortion aimed at keeping women and non-dominant groups in a condition of minority. We welcomed this broad theoretical span as yet another piece of evidence of the fertility and gap-bridging potential of the Recovery Project, and as a way of remapping the debate on autonomy by providing it with new, stimulating coordinates and orientations.

This collection proposes discussions of autonomy in and by women philosophers ranging from the Middle Ages to the 21st century. The fact that we do start in the 12th century, with Hildegard of Bingen, and then go through the 16th century, with Oliva Sabuco, the 17th century, with Madeleine de Scudery, Anne Conway, Margaret Cavendish, and the 18th century with Olympe de Gouges, Macaulay, and Wollstonecraft is evidence that we looked for conceptions of autonomy different from, though not necessarily incompatible with, the Kantian "invention" of morality as autonomy (see Schneewind 1998, 3). This does not mean that we reject Kantian autonomy as self-legislation of the subject under the moral law. However, as we suggested in the first half of this introduction, autonomy can mean many different things in different philosophical contexts, and looking for it beyond Kant, before and after, is a way of depicting the richness of that concept.



By beginning in Chapter 2 with Hildegard of Bingen in the 12th century, we do not mean to imply that autonomy as a concept did not exist until then. Indeed, autonomy played an important role in Plato's moral and political thought (Cohen 1993). Unfortunately, it is harder to find texts by women philosophers of that period—this is the reason for our medieval start. In her contribution on Hildegard of Bingen, Lerijs exposes the philosopher's surprisingly modern thought, arguing that autonomy for Hildegard of Bingen means not only being responsible for oneself morally, but also entails a form of inter-dependence, which requires humans to regard not only their own well-being as their personal responsibility, but also that of others, and of the environment.

Olivia Sabuco was a 16th-century Spanish metaphysician whose work is only now beginning to come to light thanks to Mary Ellen Waithe's scholarship. In Chapter 3, Waithe presents Sabuco as arguing for political and religious autonomy under the watchful eye of the Spanish Inquisition through a rejection of a number of Aristotelian precepts about human nature. Waithe's discussion of Sabuco on autonomy takes us through different layers of that concept, which, for Sabuco, are interdependent. Personal and political autonomy is inferred from the emphasis she places on women's mental and physical health and from her account of a well-functioning republic. Sabuco argues for collectivist limits on personal autonomy when its exercise threatens the personal freedoms or welfare of others. The resulting discussion is rich philosophically but also gives us a fascinating glimpse into the life and personality of this hitherto unknown philosopher.

Andreas Blank, in Chapter 4, discusses the works of three 17th-century philosophers: Madeleine de Scudéry, Jeanne-Michelle de Pringy, and Françoise d'Aubigné, Marquise de Maintenon, arguing that their work on "complaisance," the inclination to please socially, is in many ways a discussion of autonomy. The philosophical question which is central to all three women's discussion of complaisance is to what extent the social qualities which make (courtly) life pleasant or bearable are essentially in conflict with honesty, or with morality in general. Can one be socially acceptable and at the same time regain some sort of control on the morality of one's actions? The three philosophers Blank discusses come up with different answers to this question, each bringing out the complexity of making autonomy fit within a social context.

Margaret Cavendish lived at a time when claiming political autonomy could and did amount to revolution and regicide. Like Hobbes, she was inclined to limit the very real damages of a civil war by strengthening the power of the monarch and lessening the autonomy of the subjects. Bergès, in Chapter 5, argues that there is more to this picture, however, and that Cavendish, reflecting on the condition of women, reached different conclusions from Hobbes as to the nature of freedom. Observing that for women autonomy was prevented as much by internal as by external obstacles, led her to the conclusion that autonomy depended partly on internal growth through education.



A contemporary of Cavendish, Anne Conway, was less interested in political philosophy than metaphysics and theology. Her complex system of substances can be read, Fiona Tomkinson tells us in Chapter 6, as a discussion of different kinds and levels of autonomy. For Conway, God, or the First Substance, is autonomous in the sense of being independent, but lacks the power to change in any way. Christ, the Second Substance, can change for the better, but not the worse, whilst the Third Substance, consisting of “creatures,” including human beings, is fully autonomous in the sense of being capable of changing themselves in either direction, but not in the sense of being independent. Tomkinson then discusses contemporary eco-feminist scholarship on Conway and suggests how it may be enriched by a consideration of the questions of self-perfection and autonomy.

In Chapter 7, Alan Coffee argues that at least some women republican writers of the 18th century had developed a relational concept of personal and social freedom that anticipates and prefigures subsequent feminist critiques of individuated accounts of autonomy. Catharine Macaulay and, subsequently, Mary Wollstonecraft showed how human beings are inevitably embedded in an intricate set of social institutions, practices, and expectations that shaped their capacity to act. While everyone is influenced by their surroundings, it is women who suffer most given their subordinate social position. Using a modified form of what we would now refer to as freedom as non-domination, these writers maintained that unless the social background reflected women’s as well as men’s input and perspectives, women could not act autonomously.

In Chapter 8, Martina Reuter, whose focus is also Wollstonecraft, discusses how Schneewind’s interpretation of the invention of autonomy would look different had it included a discussion of Wollstonecraft’s moral philosophy. Reuter takes into account in particular the gender dimension of Wollstonecraft’s discussion and how Wollstonecraft’s combination of egalitarian and perfectionist tendencies challenges the opposition Schneewind posits between these two aspects of moral philosophy. She looks in particular at the place of education in the development of autonomy, a topic that is largely overlooked by Schneewind. Reuter notes that the most significant elements of Wollstonecraft’s conception of autonomy focus on questions of knowledge and education, so that, in an important sense, Wollstonecraft’s outlook is not unlike Kant’s. Reuter concludes that had she engaged with Kant’s work, Wollstonecraft would have almost certainly argued for his arguments to be extended to women.

Chapter 9 continues in the 18th century, but with an opening onto the 20th. Alberto Siani contrasts two feminist accounts of justice: that of revolutionary philosopher Olympe de Gouges and Susan Moller Okin’s. Focusing on Gouges’s Declaration of the Rights of Woman and on Okin’s critique of Rawls, Siani suggests that Gouges and Okin are both reacting to a similar problem: the exclusion of the feminine perspective from philosophical (and political) debates about justice and rights. Gouges, he notes, attempts to



solve this problem by replacing considerations of autonomy with those of social cohesion. Okin, Siani argues, achieves the same desired result while maintaining autonomy as a central goal for justice. His contribution offers a discussion of the contrast between these two responses.

Chapter 10 takes us into the 19th century, with Patrick Fessenbecker's discussion of how the novelist Mary Ward embraced the philosophy of British Idealist Thomas Hill Green, but also questioned his views about the necessary conditions for personal autonomy. This contribution reminds us of the importance of not limiting the genre of philosophical texts: Not only did much philosophy get written in the form of novels or plays in the 17th, 18th and 19th century (Voltaire wrote plays, Rousseau novels and even an opera), but this was in particular the case for women philosophers, for whom it was harder to find acceptance as "purely intellectual" writers (Scudéry, Cavendish, and Gouges are prime examples of philosophers who made use of literary genres).

With Chapter 11 we move definitely into the 20th century. Hatice Karaman looks at the works of Hélène Cixous and attempts to derive a philosophy of autonomy from Cixous's theory of "écriture féminine," which argues that women must create their own autonomy by writing about themselves. This contribution is also a comment on the tendency of philosophy to dismiss some of its women members by calling them "feminist theorists" rather than philosophers. Karaman challenges this tendency, as well as other canonical boundaries of philosophy, by reading the exchange between Cixous and Jacques Derrida not only in the light of the postmodernist topos of intertextuality, but also in that of Cixous's distinctive idea of intersexuality.

Chapter 12 brings us into the domain of applied ethics and discusses the role played by personal autonomy as self-determination in Judith Jarvis Thomson's defense of abortion. Daniela Ringkamp, in this contribution, argues that Thomson fails to give a sufficient response to the "responsibility" objection that argues that if a pregnancy is the (unintended) result of an autonomous act then the pregnant person has a responsibility to see through the pregnancy. On the other hand, Ringkamp shows that Thomson's violinist analogy points out important aspects of the woman's moral and physical involvement in a pregnancy and, in doing so, helps redefine the philosophical problem of abortion.

Chapter 13 focuses on the feminist existential phenomenology of Iris Marion Young. Martine Prange argues that Young's essay "Throwing like a girl" (1980) is an excellent starting point for reflection on the bodily and social resistances female athletes experience in sports, based on its sophisticated account of "the three modalities" of female movement due to which female athletes live a "life in contradiction" between transcendence (freedom) and immanence (lack of freedom). However, Young's account triggers the questions of whether transcendence can ever be achieved and, if so, how. Prange suggests that supplementing "Throwing like a Girl" with Young's conceptual analysis developed in "Five Faces of Oppression" may help us



understand which hindrances are on the road to freedom for female athletes. She claims that turning sports into a site of contestation and active resistance against hegemonic power is the key to the process of “de-gendering.”

The last chapter is a contribution by a contemporary scholar whose work on Kantian conceptions of autonomy is influential. Carla Bagnoli develops her view that there is a conceptual relation between autonomy, on the one hand, and emotional vulnerability, on the other. In previous works, she argued that autonomy must be understood in relational terms, and here she explores ways in which emotions contribute to agential autonomy. Her point is that emotional vulnerability is functional to agential autonomy, and her case rests on the examination of emotions that arise in contexts of mutual dependency, such as love and shame. Thus, Bagnoli’s contribution ties in with the first chapter on Hildegard von Bingen, reminding us that human beings are not by nature independent, but inter-dependent, so that a working concept of autonomy has to take into consideration the multiple ways in which we relate to each other.

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## 2 Hildegard von Bingen on Autonomy

*Julia Leri*

It might seem anachronistic to attribute the term “autonomy” to the female writer, composer, doctor, Benedictine abbess, and philosopher Hildegard von Bingen. Mostly, the term is referred to a concept that originated in the Renaissance or, philosophers would argue, as a political concept in the Greek antiquity “αὐτονομία” and was later re-semantized by Immanuel Kant in his 1785 *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*.<sup>1</sup> This chapter will show that the fundamental topic of autonomy is also addressed in close reference to the idea of human will in Hildegard’s writings,<sup>2</sup> although implicitly, especially in *Sciuias* (1141–1151), *Liber uitae meritorum* (1158–1163), and *Causae et curae* (1151–1158). Particular emphasis in this context is placed on her first visionary work, *Sciuias*.

Hildegard herself led an autonomous life. She implicitly but clearly staked her individuality and independence within a male-dominated world (Classen 2007, 133; Derschka 2014, 57; Hildegard von Bingen 1990, 215, 227f.; Hildegard von Bingen 1978, 195f., 213f.<sup>3</sup>), was an authority who joined the ranks of authorities “on current ecclesiastical politics” (Embach 2013, 281) and can be considered as “predecessor of Christine de Pisan and many others” (Gössmann 1987, 149). Hildegard had a remarkable position as a woman exegete and preacher (Kienzle 2000, 75) and “held a similarly high degree of spiritual authority, which has ranked [her] among the Doctors of the Church” (Kienzle 2015, 322). As a person known to the public, Hildegard interfered in church political events and also wrote critically to Emperor Barbarossa (Beckmann-Zöller 2010, 31). “Hildegard never hesitated to address the most respected and honored people of her time and to discuss with them both her visionary experiences and social, political, and moral issues concerning society at large” (Classen 2007, 112). Likewise, she “severely criticized her male contemporaries” (Classen 2007, 120).

Hildegard wrote many letters to the spiritual and secular leaders of her time (Hildegard von Bingen 1991<sup>4</sup>). After leaving Disibodenberg as *magistra*, she led two monasteries on Rupertsberg (1152) and in Eibingen/Rüdesheim (1165), where she also worked as a medieval counselor advising Emperor Barbarossa and his wife (Green 2007, 223). In the women’s monastery at Disibodenberg, Hildegard and her *magistra*, Jutta von Sponheim,



were responsible for at least 60 women and ill visitors who came to Disibodenberg in order to be cured (Sweet 2006, 54f.). Later on, she had two monasteries where she and her nuns helped people of all classes and thus gained an impressive knowledge of various illnesses and of human sexuality (Kruse 1996, 157). Hildegard traveled throughout the country preaching in her 60s and 70s. At this point, it is worth noting that it was completely unusual for religious women to share their knowledge outside the monastery walls. The Benedictine rule to preach in front of a foreign audience only applied to religious men (Beckmann-Zöller 2010, 25). It is fair to say that Hildegard was “living an active, if you will ‘metaphorically masculine,’ prophetic life” (Olds 1989, 65).

Hildegard’s *opus* demonstrates her independence. Her anthropology “leaves us with a promise of a freedom that leaps over the walls of understanding,” i.e. a transcending freedom (Schavan 2001, 22). She thereby created a highly independent anthropology, which is characterized by holism and a practical enhancement of the Benedictine rules (Schipperges 1998, 460). Equally and at the same time in a different way, the work expresses Hildegard’s uniqueness—by adding her own accents, she created a new literary genre, the *Visionsschrift*, which neither completely corresponded to the *summa* literature nor to the mystic tradition of the middle ages (Zátonyi 2017, 34, 40, 129). Hildegard’s doctrine of the four temperaments is truly original, detailed, and autonomous (Derschka 2014, 187). Its recognition of the personality leads to recognition of an essential area of human individuality (Derschka 2013, 10f.). Also, depth in thought is attributed to Hildegard: “Hildegard is a deep and difficult thinker. Her writings are capable of sustaining a great number of readings” (Stover 2013, 135).

In *Sciuias*, Hildegard claims that “[h]usband may not leave wife and wife may not leave husband for this purpose unless it is the will of both” (Hildegard von Bingen 1990, 215)—*nisi uoluntas amborum sit* (Hildegard von Bingen 1978, 195f.) a formula that she also used regarding children’s entry into priesthood (Derschka 2014, 57). It is insofar remarkable as she was given to the Church at an early age and in *Sciuias* let the children or adolescent choose themselves after they have reached “the age of reason” whether they are willing to enter religious life. This could indicate Hildegard’s disapproval of having to enter the religious life without having had the chance to be asked:

Children may enter the holy way of life only with their informed consent. [. . .] And if the parents of the child have brought him up in this way until the age of reason (*si autem parentes pueri eum his modis usque ad intellegibilem aetatem suam prosecuti fuerint*), and then the child turns away and will not give his consent, then they [. . .] must not offer him against his will (*eum sine uoluntate illius non offerant*) or force to enter that servitude.

(Hildegard von Bingen 1990, 227f.; Hildegard von Bingen 1978, 213, 215)



So, from the biographical point of view, it is not surprising that the aspects of autonomy, interdependence, and freedom of choice have been addressed frequently in her polyvalent work. Although not explicitly, she is referring to the human's free will, since she is not speaking of autonomy, but rather freedom of choice. Hanna-Barbara Gerl-Falkovitz speaks about a "God-founded autonomy of creation"—obeying is the experience of becoming free in this connection (Gerl-Falkovitz 1998, 35). In order to understand Hildegard's concept of will and to examine whether *Sciuias*, her first visionary work, where core passages of Hildegard's anthropology, like her body-soul theory or the reflective knowledge, can be found (Hildegard von Bingen 1978, 79–84 and 352–429), bears traces of humane autonomy at all, it is vital to define the terms and concepts, which have been defined in the sequence of reflective knowledge (*speculatiua scientia*), intellect (*intellectus*), reason (*rationalitas*),<sup>5</sup> and *discretio*<sup>6</sup> as the first step toward approximating a clearer concept of human freedom in the sense of autonomy.

The term *speculatiua scientia* was first mentioned in the fourth vision of the first part, just after one of the core anthropology passages where Hildegard defines the soul's powers, which are intellect, reason, will, etc. and explains the complicated relationship between the body and the soul. This is especially insightful because the reflective knowledge presupposes her idea of will, intellect, and reason in order to show the true free choice of the human being, namely choosing life over death and good over evil. "But you, O human, with reflective knowledge consider good and evil (*in speculatiua scientia bonum et malum inspicias*)" (Hildegard von Bingen 1990, 125; Hildegard von Bingen 1978, 86). As the concept of *speculatiua scientia*<sup>7</sup> already indicates, Hildegard uses mirror metaphors to illustrate the reflective knowledge in several parts of *Sciuias*.

Man's knowledge is like a mirror reflecting the desire for good or evil. For knowledge in man is like a mirror (*scientia in homine est quasi speculum*) in which lies latent his desire (*desiderium*) to do good or evil. And each person, standing between these two choices (*duas partes positus*), inclines himself by his will (*uoluntate sua*) toward the one he desires (*desiderat*).

(Hildegard von Bingen 1990, 383; Hildegard von Bingen 1978, 429)

Strongly connected to the *speculatiua scientia*, as shown in the quote above, is the classic ancient motif of a human's choice between two ways.<sup>8</sup> Also, Hildegard makes use of this motif to let the humans choose between the two ways, because they understand the great and the small things (Hildegard von Bingen 1990, 126f.; Hildegard von Bingen 1978, 88). Probably a better description for this kind of understanding is actually the reminiscence (*recordationem*) (Hildegard von Bingen 1978, 87) of the knowledge of the good that was lost and now partly regained by the reflective



knowledge (Hildegard von Bingen 1978, 411). “But you, O human, when you consider good and evil, are standing, as it were, where two roads branch off” (Hildegard von Bingen 1990, 125). There are only two ways, *binio, duas semitas, duas uias* (Hildegard von Bingen 1978, 87, 88, 353, 356) the humans can follow, the good and the bad one. Humans will need to follow one of the ways—not acting at all is no option. Freedom lies in the choice of one of the two paths, not in the choice as such. The reflective knowledge is God-given and essential to show humans the possible ways they could follow.

[T]hus opened to them the knowledge of choice between two ways (*speculatiuam scientiam duarum optionis*). What does this mean? A person flourishes and thrives in the living life, which is the soul, and in it he contemplates and sees two ways, good and evil; either way is open to him, so that while he is in the body he can do good or evil with soul and body, starting with his mental choice and perfecting his will in his deeds (*uoluntatem suam ita complens in opere*).

(Hildegard von Bingen 1990, 327; Hildegard von Bingen 1978, 352)

All good or bad deeds are done with both the body and the soul *bonum siue malum cum anima et corpore operator* (Hildegard von Bingen 1978, 352) and with the help of the soul’s powers, that is why the body cannot be blamed alone for wrongful deeds—it is always a result of the soul-body interaction.

The reflective knowledge shines brightly (Hildegard von Bingen 1990, 329; Hildegard von Bingen 1978, 356), because through the *speculatiua scientia* humans can understand and judge their actions and the human mind, which considers itself radiant. It glows and in its qualities reflects as a mirror, where a person—when looking into a mirror—discerns beauty and ugliness, i.e. both ways and by that can knowingly distinguish which part of the human’s immortal reason is good or evil and thereby willfully understand which is the intrinsic part of his/her being. This discernment is part of the reason and belongs to the human soul, which will live forever because of its rationality (Hildegard von Bingen 1990, 329; Hildegard von Bingen 1978, 356).

The first is the knowledge of the choice of the two roads, which is given to people when they speculate and think clearly with their minds, to make them circumspect in all their affairs (*causis suis*); and the second is earthy human flesh, for people were created by God to do active deeds (*operans factum opus in operatione*). [. . .] And every human deed proceeds from this knowledge. How? Each person can have two



ways. How? With his sensibilities he knows good and evil; and when he moves away from evil by doing good he imitates God (*imitatur Deum*).  
(Hildegard von Bingen 1990, 329; Hildegard von Bingen 1978, 355f.)

Imitating God's actions is another feature of the human being as *imago Dei*. This kind of knowledge makes the motives behind the human choice transparent and is strongly connected to human intellect and reason.

Besides the reflective knowledge, which is guided by *discretio*, intellect is a basic condition.<sup>9</sup> As one of the two principal powers of the soul (Hildegard von Bingen 1990, 120; Hildegard von Bingen 1978, 79), intellect occupies a central position in this decision-making process:

[F]or before all the other powers of the soul (*prae aliis uiribus animae*) it understands whatever is in human works, whether good or evil, so that through it, as through a teacher, everything is understood (*omnia intelleguntur*); for it sifts things as wheat is purified of any foreign matter, inquiring (*perquirens*) whether they are useful or useless, loveable or hateful, pertinent to life or death.

(Hildegard von Bingen 1990, 121; Hildegard von Bingen 1978, 80)

Interestingly, this is one of many passages in *Sciuias* where the human being is requested to choose life over death, because the person understands (*intellegit*) what is in his/her deeds and knows the right, the life-affirming way, and thereby the self-affirmative way, which has to be actively chosen by the individual:

But as it is, the grace of God has given people the support of reason (*constituit hominem rationalitate subnixum*), that they may work justice in the knowledge of good and evil (*scientia boni et mali*); and by this knowledge they can seek the good and cast away evil, and so know life and death (*cognoscat uitam et mortem*) and choose (*eligens*) which one to stay with (*remanere desideret*).

(Hildegard von Bingen 1990, 330; Hildegard von Bingen 1978, 358)

The intellect interacts with the second principal power, the will (Hildegard von Bingen 1990, 122). The chapter on the will (Hildegard von Bingen 1978, 80) specifies Hildegard's definition of the second cardinal soul power, which is not equivalent to the modern understanding of the human free will. It is a powerful force in the soul that fulfills every work, no matter if it is a good or an evil deed:

The will activates the work, and the mind receives it, and the reason produces it. [. . .] Because the will has great power (*magnam uim*)



in the soul. [. . . F]or the will does every work, whether it be good or bad. So too the will is the strength of the whole work [. . .] in whatever differing circumstances the work is performed, whether in infancy youth, adulthood or bent old age, it always progresses in the will and in the will comes to perfection (*perfectionem*). [. . .] But the will has in the human breast a tabernacle, the mind, upon which the intellect and that same will and a sort of force of the soul all breathe in strength (*uis animae sua fortitudine afflant*). [. . .] But when the will wills (*uoluntas uoluerit*), it can move the implements in the tabernacle and in its burning ardor dispose of them, whether they are good or evil.

(Hildegard von Bingen 1990, 121f.; Hildegard von Bingen 1978, 80f.)

The intellect is also interconnected to reason, mind, and the senses. In the Latin edition (Hildegard von Bingen 1978, 82ff.), Hildegard uses the singular *sensus* as a collective term when referring to humans' five senses. It, *sensus*, is one of the human components, part of the ternary form soul—body—senses, with which the human being awakes in the womb before birth. All the powers of the soul are inferred by the senses:

But a person has within himself three paths. What are they? The soul, the body and the senses (*Animam, corpus et sensus*); and all human life is led in these. How? The soul vivifies (*uiuificat*) the body and conveys the breath of life (*exspirat*) to the senses; the body draws the soul to itself (*attrahit*) and opens (*aperit*) the senses; and the senses touch (*tangunt*) the soul and draw (*alliciunt*) the body. [. . .] It is the senses on which the interior powers of the soul depend, so that these powers are known through them by the fruits of each work. [. . .] The exterior human being awakens with senses in the womb of his mother before he is born (*primis cum sensu*), but the other powers of the soul still remain in hiding. What is this? The dawn announces the daylight; just so the human senses manifest the reason and all the powers of the soul. [. . . A]lso human senses protect a person from harmful things and lay bare the soul's interior. [. . . The senses enclose the powers of the soul (*Sensus omnes uires animae claudit*)<sup>10</sup> . . . T]he powers of the soul are inferred by the senses (*in sensu ceterae uires animae intelleguntur*).

(Hildegard von Bingen 1990, 120, 123; Hildegard von Bingen 1978, 79, 83)

Without the intellect, the other powers are insipid and undiscerning. Its function is to filter the human deeds by closely examining them, thereby the intellect understands the work (Hildegard von Bingen 1990, 121; Hildegard



von Bingen 1978, 80). Since humans are armed with intellect (Hildegard von Bingen 1990, 101; Hildegard von Bingen 1978, 54), they are capable of making decisions at all.

Along with the intellect, reason plays an important role within the powers of the soul, because it strives for free choice “and choosing among options in various matters as if by some rule, for the soul has discernment in reason” (Hildegard von Bingen 1990, 151). It is the sound of the soul (Hildegard von Bingen 1990, 122; Hildegard von Bingen 1978, 82) which discerns all giving things: “There is the power of reason which, according to God, produces, dispenses and discerns all the things (*disponit et discernit omnia*) that God has given since there is nothing that the power of reason cannot penetrate and keenly analyze” (Hildegard von Bingen 1994, 85; Hildegard von Bingen 1995, 85). Every work is brought to perfection by reason (Hildegard von Bingen 1978, 82). Human beings are rational animals (Hildegard von Bingen 1990, 384; Hildegard von Bingen 1978, 430) who have intellect, *discretio*, and wisdom. These skills should aid the humans to do rational deeds (Hildegard von Bingen 1990, 384; Hildegard von Bingen 1978, 430). With the support of reason, humans achieve justice in the knowledge of good and evil (Hildegard von Bingen 1990, 330; Hildegard von Bingen 1978, 358). The critical examination of options for action is an immanent human ability and it expresses the power to discern, analyze, and study all things:

The person himself observes his deeds by the exercise of his reason (*inspiciente in scientia rationalitatis*). With this reason he contemplates good and evil (*inspicit bonum et malum*), and the desire rises in him to choose between the two ways, good and evil, according to his will (*boni uidelicet et mali secundum uoluntatem ipsius*). What does this mean? The person has the choice in that his mind’s desires (*desiderio animi sui*) reflect different things to him like a mirror, and he says to himself, “If only I could do this or that!” He has not yet done them in actuality, but he has thought about them. So he stands at the fork of the two roads, with knowledge of the motives of good or evil; and as he desires so at last he does (*secundum desiderium suum tendit tandem ad opus*).

(Hildegard von Bingen 1990, 331; Hildegard von Bingen 1978, 359)

The interaction of intellect and reason in order to express the free will deriving from the permeated knowledge is important. Reason understands the two ways to knowledge of good and evil (Hildegard von Bingen 1990, 374; Hildegard von Bingen 1978, 414). This following passage, taken out of Hildegard’s letter to the five abbots (Stover 2013, 130), illustrates her understanding of the human as rational being:



For God, namely, gave reason to the human. Because of God's word the human is rational. But the irrational creature is like a sound. In this way, God created the whole creation in the human being (*omnem creaturam in homine*). But he gave two wings to rationality, the right signifies the knowledge of good, and the left wing signifies the knowledge of evil. Thus, human is quasi winged (*In his homo est quasi uolatilis sit*).

(Hildegard von Bingen 1991, 155,  
my translation)

Hildegard repeats the rationality-wing-analogy in several letters (Ranff 2001, 210; Chávez 1991, 211; Hildegard von Bingen 1991, 170, 342).

Humans have been, after all, endowed with the attribute of intelligence and are thereby rational beings who have to make decisions and take responsibility. Thus, human beings are capable of directing themselves and others with the help of *discretio*: “God gave man (*homini*) the ability to work (*possibilitatem operandi*); he also divided up his knowledge so that he could discern (*discernendi*) what is honest and what is dishonest” (Hildegard von Bingen 1994, 180; Hildegard von Bingen 1995, 178). *Discretio* is important for humans in order to distinguish between various deeds (Hildegard von Bingen 1990, 121; Hildegard von Bingen 1978, 80). Humans are God's complete work (*plenum opus Dei*) (Hildegard von Bingen 1995, 257), and, thus, they are powerful, can abuse the freedom they were given, and can corrupt the system by only following their own needs. The human being as *opus* and *imago Dei* reflects the godly side by working justly and with *discretio* (Hildegard von Bingen 1990, 406; Hildegard von Bingen 1978, 459). In order to govern or direct themselves and others, people need *discretio*, so they provide each person with their own space, thus respect them. Due to the potential of humans to understand and the awareness to differentiate by the means of *discretio* (Hildegard von Bingen 1990, 337; Hildegard von Bingen 1978, 368), they are confronted with the obligation to follow the good path that arises from this reflective insight.

As shown, the conceptual definition of the above-mentioned terms made it possible to approximate Hildegard's concept of autonomy. In this case, autonomy is connoted with the human's freedom of choice, not freedom as such. In Hildegard's *Causae et curae*, humans are not determined insofar as they can decide within a wide range of development opportunities (Riha 2015, 79). In *Sciuias*, Hildegard stresses the idea of human's free will and thereby attributes autonomy to human beings to the extent that they have the choice to decide which path—the good or the evil—they will take by the means of *speculatiua scientia*, *intellectus*, *rationalitas*, and *discretio*.

Alongside the above-mentioned powers of the soul, humans, namely, recognize God in his deeds by the means of wisdom and, understanding him, work their deeds as wisely as him. Nevertheless, humans often fail to cultivate their predispositions and miss the greatness they were created for. This failure



develops on the erroneous belief, which is based on self-will, that humans could only grow to outsize themselves. So, the rebellious human being neglects the given insights and the reasonably wise way (Hildegard von Bingen 1990, 438; Hildegard von Bingen 1978, 499). Even more, humans strive to only follow their self-will, which is troublesome because they thereby are not open to act reasonably and thus according to what is best also for their environment (Hildegard von Bingen 1990, 104, 218, 328, 433, 464, 504; Hildegard von Bingen 1978, 57, 200, 354, 491, 536, 594). If humans fulfill wrongful deeds they are encouraged to rethink their behavior and turn to an intelligible way, but they cannot be forced to change their minds, since humans are “consented to him of their own accord” and that is why they “could not be taken away from him” (Hildegard von Bingen 1990, 81). In this chapter, “him” refers to the devil in the postlapsarian state. Not choosing the good way led eventually to consenting to the evil powers, hence, the devil. That is why God sent His Son to help humans follow the good path again. This passage is tracing back to the immediate time after the Fall, since then humans are condemned to constantly making their choice. As a result, humans are confronted with the necessity of continuously making decisions in every situation balancing their knowledge of good and evil in order to decide what is good for them and their environment.

Freedom of choice causes trouble, not only for human beings who are constantly confronted with the diverse results of their choice, but also for their environment, which bemoans the human self-will: “[You] follow your own will” (Hildegard von Bingen 1990, 104). Transgressing or acting outside the intended realm of possibilities and potentials without *rationalitas* and *discretio*, namely being irresponsible and seeking to become purely autonomous beings by perpetually choosing ways which are only good for humans but not for their environment, is highly problematic. Here a clear line has been drawn; the humans are put in their place. Hildegard sets limits to human’s desire to gain knowledge. They are not to know more than God allows them to: “Humans must not scrutinize God’s secrets beyond what He wishes to show” (Hildegard von Bingen 1990, 154).

Also, humans have no insight into their prenatal past and future:

MAN MAY IGNORE WHAT MAY ALSO BE ABOUT TO BE BEFORE HIM [. . .] This is because man will be able to speak right up to the end of his time, although he may not know what came before him or will come after him (*quid autem ante eum uel quid post eum futurum sit ignorant*).

(Hildegard von Bingen 1994, 20)

Humans are strongly linked to their surroundings and the elements that constitute the environment (Hildegard von Bingen 1990, 98; Hildegard von Bingen 1978, 48). The elements referred to are mostly the four classical elements: fire, water, earth, and air. In the third vision of the first part of *Sciuias*,



however, Hildegard also uses the term “elements” in reference to parts of the macrocosm which constitute the world (Hildegard von Bingen 1978, 48). The relationship between humans and their environment is marked by reciprocity and is a reminder of human’s ecological responsibility to gain their insights from their surroundings. “God established everything so that each and everything looks back to another (*quod unumquodque in aliud respiciat*), for the more one understands from another what it does not know in itself, the more than one knows” (Hildegard von Bingen 1994, 176; Hildegard von Bingen 1995, 174). Well-equipped with all means to direct themselves and others with *discretio*, rational humans, in this anthropocentric world view, have to take responsibility for their environment. Nature itself needs the intervention of human beings just as human beings are dependent on the atmosphere, plants, and animals. It is not only the firmament, actually, but also the human bodies, which were shaped by the elements.

In the beginning of her medical work entitled *Causae et curae*,<sup>11</sup> Hildegard describes the relationship between the elements and humans as

they are within the human, and the human concerns himself with them (*Ipsa in homine sunt, et homo cum illis operator*). [. . .] For all our deeds touch the elements and are shaken up by this, because they are tossed about together with the elements.

(Hildegard von Bingen 1999, 25; Hildegard von Bingen 2003, 22)

This relationship is strained because humans transgress their assigned area and hence cause problems:

THE COMPLAINT OF THE ELEMENTS (*Querela elementorum*) 2. I heard a loud voice speaking from the elements of the earth saying to this man: “Hurry. We cannot finish our journey since we have been pushed aside by our master, for men subvert us with their crooked ways, just as a mill stone does. Therefore, we stink with pestilence and hunger after all justice (*fame omnis iustitie fetemus*).”

(Hildegard von Bingen 1994, 125; Hildegard von Bingen 1995, 119, 124)

The assigned area is being with the other creatures. It is strongly linked to the human as *imago Dei* who has to act reasonably and justly in the world because of the reflection of the godly side. Humans are expected to be moderate and act according to their rational insights, so it is considered unjust to act without considering the other living creatures, which, in turn, is followed by the complaint of elements:

The fact that the elements are overturned by human injustices. [. . . B] ecause they are with the elements and the elements are with them ([Q]



*uia homines in illis et illa cum hominibus sunt.*). This is because men close their mouths to righteousness and to the other virtues so that they do not have to open their mouths and hearts to truth.

(Hildegard von Bingen 1994, 137; Hildegard von Bingen 1995, 139)

By bemoaning the human's desire to follow the self-will, Hildegard raises a variation of the theodicy question in regard to humans as free agents: "What is Man to do, when God knows in advance (*praenouit*) everything Man is going to do?" (Hildegard von Bingen 1990, 116; Hildegard von Bingen 1978, 73) The question is answered by coarse insults directed at the egocentric humans who only see themselves and are too stubborn to see the greater good in which they are contextualized, namely having a place among the other creatures and the duty to work with the others and not only for themselves (Hildegard von Bingen 1990, 116f.; Hildegard von Bingen 1978, 73).

But for a reasonable human it is possible to fight against these harmful decisions with the help of the powers of the soul. Again, it is the intellect that helps the humans to fulfill their good deeds:

But you, O human, say "I cannot do good works!" I say you can. And you say "How?" And I say, "By thought and action (*Intellectu et operatione*)."

And you answer, "I lack decision." And I answer, "Learn to fight against yourself! (*Disce pugnare contra te.*)"

(Hildegard von Bingen 1990, 127; Hildegard von Bingen 1978, 89)

This groundbreaking call to fight against oneself is tied back to the wise and rational human being. The realization of the apparent inability to do so is a prerequisite for the reconsideration of days and thus the basis for rational action. Thus, the only condition is that the human being does not remain passive, but makes use of his/her mind and opposes his/her laziness.

In her second visionary work, *Liber uitae meritorum*, Hildegard illustrates another mean, the *rota scientiae*, which shows and advises humans in which direction to turn without being mandatory. It is the rational human being who has an insight into the given options who is able to discern the two possible ways: "[S]ince man has both the knowledge of good and evil. For man is able to know what part of the wheel of knowledge (*rota scientiae*) declines" (Hildegard von Bingen 1994, 135; Hildegard von Bingen 1995, 136). Also, humans, like God, have been given the opportunity to do their work, set up rules, and make decisions: "He likewise created all creatures from himself, just as a man dictates and does his work (*homo opera sua*) through no other creature than himself (*per semetipsum dictat et operator*)" (Hildegard von Bingen 1994, 287; Hildegard von Bingen 1995, 289). Again, it is the *imago Dei* that is allowed to work and which may act



at its own discretion. Thus, humans have been provided with the freedom to decide and thereby with a certain degree of autonomy. Humans, also ill humans, have the freedom to live their lives responsibly, to orientate themselves, and choose within the scope of freedom (Schipperges 1998, 459).

In the end, the decision about how to act remains with the human being: “So I leave them to find out how much their own will (*uoluntas ipsorum*) can help them when they trust in themselves (*confidunt eos possit adiuvare*)” (Hildegard von Bingen 1990, 226; Hildegard von Bingen 1978, 212). In detail, since there is no human being who is not able to distinguish between good and evil: “Has there been any person in the world who did not have knowledge of good and evil? No.” (Hildegard von Bingen 1994, 104), they have to bear the consequences that result from their actions, this is an immanent human trait:

Man has the knowledge of good and evil and so has no excuse (*QUOD HOMO HABENS SCIENTIAM BONI ET MALI INEXCVSABILIS EST*). So, you have the knowledge of good and evil, and the ability to work (*Habes enim scientiam boni et mali atque efficaciam operandi*). And so, you cannot plead as an excuse that you lack any good thing [. . .] And why have you this great power? So that you may avoid evil and do good. And you will answer to Me for your knowledge of good and evil, as you know yourself to be human (*qua intellegis quod homo es*).

(Hildegard von Bingen 1990, 473; Hildegard von Bingen 1978, 547)

According to Hildegard, it is impossible to conceive humans as purely autonomous, i.e. self-sufficient and isolated beings. Humans cannot exist in isolation, without reference to anyone else or as abstract beings. More specifically, humans can only exist in reference to someone else and not as ends in themselves. Rather, humans are intended to live in reciprocal relationships in which one human being is realized through the other in mutual dependency. Consequently, human beings are not only responsible for their personal (human) prosperity and happiness but also for their fellow human beings’ and the environment’s as well. The autonomous but dependent human being is a rational being, one that has to make decisions and take responsibility. As a result, being autonomous means having the freedom and at the same time the duty to decide in every situation by balancing one good against another via *discretion*, *speculatiua scientia*, and *rationalitas*.

## Notes

1 Cf. GMS, AA 04: 440.16–20.

2 For the visionary works and *Causae et curae* already published translations were used throughout this chapter. In order to be able to better understand the



statements of the original text, original Latin passages were added in italics in some paragraphs. The spelling of the names and words, which are quoted from the critical editions were not changed, e.g. *uoluntas* instead of *voluntas*. As for the letters, the English translations are mine.

- 3 The 1978, 1991, and 1995 *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio mediaevalis* volumes 43/43A, 90, 91/91A as well as the 2003 *Rarissima mediaevalia Opera latina* volume 1 refer to critical Latin editions which differ from the English editions. In the interests of consistency and clarity, the Hildegard standard way of citation which states the lines, parts, visions, and chapters was adapted to the style of this volume.
- 4 The 1991 *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio mediaevalis* volumes are two parts of the same volume (91/91A) with continuing pages.
- 5 Fabio Álvarez Chávez systematically examined Hildegard's use of the terms *rationalitas* and *ratio* (Chávez 1991, 131–249). An up-to-date summary of Hildegard's *rationalitas* account is given by Maura Zátónyi (Zátónyi 2017, 136–139).
- 6 The term *discretio* goes back to the rule of Benedict of Nursia and is the “mother of all virtues.” It is mostly referred to as wise moderation or discernment and is the opposite of immoderation. For Hildegard scholars like Elisabeth Gössmann or Heinrich Schipperges, it is problematic to translate the multi-faceted term *discretio* only with discretion or discernment because it only covers one part of the Benedictine interpretation Hildegard used in her writings. It is also the ability to measure and distinguish the proportions of the micro- and macrocosm.
- 7 A subsection dedicated to the *speculatiua scientia* can be found in Viki Ranff's dissertation (Ranff 2001, 261–266) and in her article on Hildegard's philosophical issues (Ranff 2015).
- 8 Most commonly known as “The Choice of Heracles” from Xenophon's *Memorabilia* 2, 1, 21.
- 9 Maura Zátónyi's dissertation addresses the topic of Hildegard's visions as cognitive processes (Zátónyi 2012, esp. 182–246).
- 10 “The senses enclose the powers of the soul” is my translation.
- 11 *Causae et curae* (1150s) is considered to be one of the earliest medical texts by a European practitioner and female medical writer before the 14th century. Alongside Trotula, Hildegard was the first woman who attempted to interpret the world in terms of science (Green 2001, 228; Maddocks 2001, 147; Riethe 2011, 293; Sweet 2006, 6). Her developmental conceptions of the genesis of humans differ from the conceptions of the traditional medicine of the Middle Ages, which were chiefly dominated by the schools of Salerno and Montpellier (Bäumer-Schleinkofer 2000, 215; Green 2001, 228; Riethe 2011, 293).

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# 3 Freedom's Just Another Word for Nothin' Left to Lose

## Oliva Sabuco's Philosophy and Life

*Mary Ellen Waithe*

### Introduction

The words of 20th-century American singer-songwriter Kris Kristoffersen best summarize the views of Oliva Sabuco (1562–1629?) with respect to autonomy: “Freedom is just another word for nothin’ left to lose.” Oliva Sabuco’s several treatises comprising *Nueva Filosofía de la Naturaleza del Hombre* (*New Philosophy of Human Nature*) were first published when she was 25 years old. She had neither the respectability conferred by a formal university education nor the comparative shelter of convent. Neither did she enjoy the privilege of aristocracy to shield her from criticism of her work, criticism that could threaten her freedom.

In the first part of this chapter, I argue that on both professional and personal levels, Oliva Sabuco exercised varying forms of freedom. I show how her theory broke free of tradition, replacing classical medicine’s methodology with one that presaged aspects of the scientific method that characterizes modern Western medical theory. Sabuco employed her new methodology to discard as false two different medical paradigms: anatomical symmetry and the male as norm. She argued that medicine had nothing left to lose by trying her theory.

In the briefer, second part of this chapter, I describe the limited personal liberties available to Oliva Sabuco and the dispute between her and her father. I show that Sabuco had nothing left to lose by alienating her father whose retaliation against her created a risk to her personal liberty and perhaps her life. Her exercise of freedom paid off for her personally, just as her theory advanced medical theory.

### 1. Nothing Left to Lose Except Dogma and False Paradigms

Sabuco urged her readers to examine her argument on its own merits and ask why, if medicine were founded on a correct philosophy of human nature, it so miserably failed to cure disease and assure health and longevity.

Galen, Plato, and Hippocrates were in need of this entire book for their treatises about human nature, and so was Aristotle in his treatises about



the soul and about life and death. It was also wanting in the naturalists such as Pliny, Aelian, and others who dealt with mankind. This was the philosophy needed, and the best, and the one most fruitful to man, as it was left untouched by the great ancient philosophers.

(Sabuco 2007, 44)

And:

The ancient physicians judged otherwise because they did not recognize the drainage [. . .] of brain fluid through the cerebellum [. . .] of the brain, i.e., [. . .] the spinal cord that springs from the brain. Even so, the opinions of the ancients did not change human nature into what they said it was, but it remained as it [actually] was, and their opinions did not sway it. Rather, to the contrary, their opinions will have to change, but let us leave it here.

(Sabuco 2007, 66–7)

She asks King Felipe II to give her theory an opportunity to prove its correctness:

For my petition is fair: to test my doctrine for one year [. . .] Hippocrates' and Galen's medicine have been tested for two thousand years, and their results have been so ineffective and inconclusive, as we clearly see every day and as was seen during the great flu, spotted fever, smallpox, and during many other illnesses where [medicine] does not work at all. Out of a thousand only three survive until natural death arrives. The others die violent deaths from illness, not having benefited from the old medicine.

(Sabuco 2007, 45)

Sabuco suggested that a concept of human nature be consistent with metaphysics and cosmology. Barbone, quoting J. L. Barona, notes:

Like so many others writing in her time period, Sabuco sees humankind as a miniature model of the universe within the larger universe itself so that there is a single and general conception of *Nature*, in which cosmology and *human physiology* shared a unique and identical meaning as particular realizations of a "*Universal physis*."

(Barbone 2015, 26)

Barbone reminds us that:

interest in the body and its health, especially as it was imagined to be a model for the health of the civil state and a reflection of the natural condition, seemed to hold a special fascination among Spanish Renaissance



writers [. . .] For her as for many others of her period, because the human body is a mirror of the entire natural universe, it is proper to natural philosophy to investigate the whole of nature as well as the functioning of the human body.

(*ibid*)

#### A. *Freedom From Aristotelian Dogma: Towards an Empiricist Methodology*

Sabuco proposed to learn from what today we would refer to as the data or the evidence. She called it “what we see every day” (Sabuco 2007, 45ff). Even the most cursory read through Sabuco’s work reveals a recurring, but unexplained empiricist methodology that in the next century would become the new foundation for the scientific revolution. Although she often relies upon arguments from authority (citing philosophers and revered authors) Sabuco peppers her arguments with multiple examples of known facts that support her argument. Some sets of examples are a combination of historical examples and “everyday” examples. In the following excerpt, her character Antonio has argued that living a life of too much wealth or power can create distress that results in illness and premature death. Persons who have given up wealth and power found their lives to be happier and healthier. Sabuco presents her data:

Diocletian, emperor of Rome, at the Senate, sitting in his throne wearing the imperial toga, got up, removed his toga and laid it over the throne, and told the Senate: Give it to anyone you wish, for I do not want it. He took off to a family estate and orchard that he had, [which was] far away from Rome, and there he lived in peace and quiet. To those who visited him, he said: Now I live; now it is dawn for me. Many others did the same, such as the philosopher Crates of Thebes, who threw away his money into the sea. Pope Celestine V abandoned the pontificate, stripped himself of the papal seal and the pontifical chair, and ordered the cardinals to elect a pope. He retired to a pious and peaceful life [. . .]. The ever victorious Charles V, our lord, gave the world this example [. . .] If we were to name here all the sages who have said so, it would be tedious. [. . .] I also advise you that to preserve health, a moderate condition in life with few worries is better than a higher social status.

(99–100)

This empirical evidence is aimed primarily at an intended audience of classically educated people, at readers who would recognize the historical accounts of Diocletian and Crates, at persons who in the 16th century would be cognizant of 13th-century Church history, for example, an audience that included physicians and medical theorists.



Such examples do not merely serve Sabuco's arguments as empirical data or evidence. They recount events that occurred centuries, if not millennia apart. The additional significance of these examples is that they also serve as evidence collected (by historians) over a very extended period of time—much of human history as it was then known! If we were to describe this aspect of Sabuco's theory in contemporary language we would say that Sabuco was arguing that the practice of medicine needed to be based upon empirically verifiable data that was collected over an extended period of time, and different places, not upon mistaken classical theories created by great authors. Although throughout *New Philosophy of Human Nature* Sabuco invokes "authorities" including Aristotle, Plato, Pliny, Seneca, Hippocrates, Ibn Sina (as Avicenna) and Galen she preferred to develop her theory based upon "what we clearly see every day" (45) than upon the dogma handed down by such theorists. I previously mentioned that her "Letter of Dedication to the King, Our Lord" hinted at the value of experience: Dogmatic medicine had been tried and failed for 2,000 years; hers should be tried for at least one year to determine whether it would be successful (Ibid.) That is, her theory should be tested empirically.

Quotidian examples/empirical data would be familiar to an agrarian or small-town audience. In the following passage, Sabuco discusses the somatic effects of a frightening experience that she calls "dreadful anticipation," an emotion experienced by what she calls "the sensitive soul."

This emotion has a greater effect on women, especially pregnant women, who suffer miscarriages and pass away fearing and dreading minor, unfounded things. Cecilia, tricked by a scarecrow crafted by some lads, collapsed and never came back to life. There are so many, and it happens so often, as we all know and see every day. So there is no need to bring up examples, because just by seeing a child about to trip, or the word that a bull is coming, or watching a glass about to fall, or twisting [out of] the clog, women suffer great harm and sometimes even miscarry.

(55)

Although Oliva Sabuco did not use the terms "empiricism" or "empirical" or "data" (and neither did empiricists of the next century), considered all together, her numerous examples must be understood to be Sabuco's empirical data, and empiricism must be understood to be the methodology through which she proposed we understand human nature. That understanding would form the basis for her theory of medicine.

How would she evaluate whether her theory was true? I speculate that she would require her philosophy of human nature to be generalizable: to explain not only human nature, but all of animal and plant nature. Her medical theory should extrapolate not only to the terrestrial world, but, as Barone and Barbone (quoted *supra*) noted, they should apply to the cosmos



itself. Furthermore, human positive law and social practices should be compatible with sound medical theory: If not, the populace will suffer unnecessary illnesses and will die young, painful deaths. Although Sabuco's book supports this view, reading any single treatise in isolation may cause the reader to miss the big picture that Sabuco sketches.

According to Sabuco, medical theory as represented by Aristotle (117), Galen (*ibid*) and Ibn Sina (*ibid*) failed in large part because they relied upon the Aristotelian concept of final cause to formulate recommended treatments (287) (Unlike other sources she relies upon, Sabuco does not provide her sources of Aristotle's thought. Perhaps she relies upon information learned from her neighbor Pedro Simón Abril, a famed Aristotelian scholar and translator, or upon mentions of Aristotle's views appearing in other works.) As then used in medicine, the doctrine of final cause explained the goal, end or purpose for which an act or state of affairs—such as plague—occurred. Dogmatist explanations of the final cause of plague included the alleged sinfulness of victims and communities it struck: punishment for debauchery, war, apostasy.

Noting empirically verifiable environmental conditions and social practices that coincided with bouts of plague, Sabuco inferred that conditions such as overcrowding and hot, dry, stale air aided the transmission of plague (85).

The plague comes from two sources: from the element air or from a contagious disease that also is airborne [. . .]. This is what we see in the air that brings the devastating plague, as it was during the last great epidemic. We see that just by talking to another, even at some distance, one who has contracted the plague causes the other person to get it through the air. This illness enters the body by breathing through the nose or through the mouth. It can enter through the eyes, which are also a convenient channel to the brain.

(72)

Sabuco's empirical observations and criticism of dogmatic medical theory prompted an upsetting revolution in medical theory. In plague-ridden London, a quarter-century after its first publication Sabuco's work was recommended by Stephen Bradwell, later, author of the world's first "First Aid" manual (Bradwell 1633). Bradwell, and all London physicians, came under the supervision of the Royal College of Physicians of London (RCPL). Few physicians dared question the received Aristotelian/Galenic medical theory. Nevertheless, a sufficient number did so, *sotto voce*, and were labeled "anti-dogmatist." Empiricists like Sabuco were amongst those whose theory was tarred by the RCPL with the anti-dogmatist slur. In 1605, Member of the House of Commons Francis Bacon had encouraged physicians to maintain an open mind about the received medical dogma and to investigate why it was that "empirics and old women are more happy many times in their cures than learned physicians" (Bacon 1885, 181). But Bacon was not yet



the well-known author of *Novum Organum* (Bacon 1620), not yet the “father of empirical science,” and his early arguments in favor of empirical method held no sway with the RCPL. Bradwell’s recommendation of Sabuco’s theory generated backlash and RCPL censure for supporting her non-dogmatic, empirical approach. In 1610, he was prosecuted by a committee of the RCPL headed by William Harvey (Clark 1964, 201 n.1). Its indictment read:

“*Quod Παράδοξον Sabuci Hispani de chyli transitu, mesaricarum tractu umbilicalis usu, fibris, oesophagi omnigenis, nutritione percutum, et aliis male promulgavit*” which evidently relates to the book, Oliva Sabuco de Nantes Barrera, *Nova Philosophia de Hominis Natura*. (ibid.)

The Latin is idiosyncratic. I translate it as:

“Which paradox by the Spaniard Sabuco concerns the movement of chyle, the mesentery tract, the functioning of the umbilicus, the esophageal fibers, percutaneous nutrition, which are wrongful promulgations” which indictment evidently relates to the book Oliva Sabuco de Nantes Barrera *New Philosophy of Human Nature*.

Among anti-dogmatic features of Sabuco’s book mentioned in the indictment are the role of *chilo* and the fact that the brain was aware of the taste of food before the mesentery vein could (as was generally believed) circulate food to the heart whose functions were at that time assumed to include brain-like sensations of satiety (Sabuco 2007, 79). (This view of the heart as the locus of emotion and sensation may account for the survival of such bizarre expressions as “I love you with all my heart.”). The indictment also refers to Sabuco’s argument that the fibers of the tongue, palate, and esophagus transmit to the brain via the nervous system food’s taste, and feelings of satiety. In addition, it refers to her view that certain nutrients can be absorbed through the skin (64). Finally, the indictment of Bradwell mentions Sabuco’s recommendation of percutaneous nutrition. Sabuco recommended enteral feeding: surgically accessing the intestines via an incision in the umbilicus (165), funneling liquid nutrition into a patient who could not eat. Although artificial feeding by other means such as by enema was practiced by ancient Egyptians and Greeks, Sabuco’s is the earliest mention I have found of parenteral nutrition via the umbilicus. Other methods (via esophagus, veins) were developed shortly after the publication of her book. But I cannot with confidence attribute the invention of this method to her.

In summary, one of Oliva Sabuco’s important contributions can be understood her being amongst the first philosophers to recommend the use of empiricist methods in science. In addition, she recommends that any medical



theory be based upon a sound theory of human nature that consistently fits with a sound theory of the macrocosm. Significantly, she also argued that civil law and social practices should support good medical practice. Medicine had nothing to lose by rigorous philosophical examination of the validity of its own theories. For Sabuco, it was her reputation and perhaps her life that was at stake, although she wrote as though she had nothing left to lose.

### *B. Freedom From Two False Paradigms*

Elsewhere, I described how Sabuco's theory aimed to free medicine from two false paradigms (Waithe 2004). These paradigms persist in medicine to date and are exemplified by Leonardo da Vinci's sketch, "Vitruvian Man." We have no evidence that Sabuco was familiar with this sketch, but she knew all too well the two medical paradigms it represented: that of symmetry of human anatomy, and that of the male as human norm.

#### *Function, not Form*

Sabuco's emphasis on the function of organs, especially the brain and central nervous system, over symmetrical placement of paired organs (such as lungs or kidneys) or of symmetrical shape of individual organs (such as the oral cavity) represents a significant departure from dogmatic medical tradition. Descartes is considered to be an important medical theorist. He was 25 years old when, at age 62, Oliva Sabuco published the third edition of her work, a work already known to Parisian physicians, including Charles le Pois, whose praise of her anti-Aristotelianism was published in 1618 (Pisonis 1618). Descartes had a close friend and mentor, the Minim Père Mersenne. According to Dan Garber (Garber 2004) Mersenne helped rehabilitate Etienne de Clave who, in 1624, had been banned from teaching for publishing theses in support of Sabuco's view (de Clave 1635). Perhaps ignorant of Sabuco's argument against the paradigm of symmetry, and her identification of the brain as the locus of mind-body interaction, Descartes identified the pineal gland as the place of that interaction. He says that his reason for doing so was two-fold, first, because the pineal body is the only non-paired, asymmetrically shaped organ of the brain and, second, because it is located in the center of the brain's concavities. Writing in January 1640 to King Louis XIII's physician and Mersenne's friend Lazarre Meyssonier, Descartes says:

my opinion is that this gland is the primary seat of the soul and the place where all of our thoughts form themselves. The reason that gives me this belief is that I have not found any other part in the entire brain except that one alone, that is not doubled [. . .] moreover, it is situated in the most *apropos* location possible: in the middle of the concavities



and is surrounded by small branches of the carotid arteries which bring the spirits into the brain.

(Descartes 1988, 20–21)

Long before Descartes, Sabuco had argued that organ shape and symmetrical placement in the body were not paradigms of human health: organ function, controlled by the brain through its transubstantiation of chyle and circulation of *chilo* throughout the body was key.

### *The Human, Not the Male, as Paradigm*

Sabuco's inclusion of women as sources of empirical data seems to have been motivated by her experience that medicine based on a male paradigm simply didn't succeed for women or for men. Both were susceptible to untreatable illness and disease. So instead, as part of her desire for a valid methodology Sabuco based her theory of medicine on a human model. She introduced a standard that represents a major break from any medical theory, indeed any other philosophy of human nature until recent centuries. She posited the model of human nature to be one enjoyed in common by both sexes. She stands out among medical theorists of the 16th century by discussing several dozen times uniquely female biological processes including menstruation (Sabuco 170), childbirth (196), lactation (116), and menopause (104–107) while noting that men also reach a climacteric (*ibid*).

Although the topic of the following passage is the role of *chilo* (cerebrospinal fluid and similar white or clear bodily secretions), Sabuco employs female anatomical function as equally paradigmatic. She does not treat that which is essentially female as aberrant or deficient male:

It is laughable that they said that sperm and milk are red blood which only becomes white inside their ducts. Señor Doctor, do not be shocked by what I say about this white blood and about the great workings of the white brain fluid [*chilo*]. You see what [*chilo*] does when it descends into the female uterus where it makes an entire new animal through the nourishing flow of menstrual blood. It is more difficult to build anew a body than improve the one already there. Hence, I conclude that the brain is the place where the seed was created.

(206)

Sabuco validates the reported experiences of lactating women and notes that psychological distress can impede production of breast milk. She connects physical function to brain states:

In sum, this white fluid from the brain is also the reproductive one. It is funny to say that the seed and milk are just milk transformed by the spleen. Young women clearly sense how their milk is produced.



Through their backs, armpits, and breasts they feel how it drains. But they are also aware that it stops if they have emotional stress that is discontent and discord from the soul.

(237)

The above are just a few examples of her paradigm-smashing inclusion of the female in the model of the normal, healthy human.

Sabuco's views on heredity and reproduction were quite advanced for her day partly because she attributes such functions to control by the brain, and partly because she sees a more active role in heredity for women than did traditional medicine. She holds that the brain is responsible for the development of sperm in men, and for what contemporary medicine would identify as eggs and uterine lining in women but which she can empirically verify only as discharged menstrual fluid:

females' menstruation serves as secondary matter in the uterus for development of the human species. This white fluid of the brain gives humans the reproductive force needed to multiply. When it exits the seminal channels as happens during coitus, it generates new life. It provides for the development of all human organs [. . .] Ibn Sina called this [fluid] "cambium." In sum, this white fluid from the brain is also the reproductive one.

(Sabuco 2007, 237)

Closely related and integral to the question of women's transmission of hereditary features is the mechanism through which they do so. Here, she sees separate but equal roles of both genders in reproduction and recognizes that brain-transmitted *chilo* simply follows different anatomical conduits to the reproductive organs.

The better part of *chilo* is sent to the spinal medulla [. . .] from which nerves branch out. [The spinal medulla] is the place from which this best part of the white blood is distributed to the seminal vessels, where it again gets transformed. It takes the form of sperm in the kidneys and testicles. If any of it is evacuated during coitus, it turns into fatty globules. The sensitive or emotional [soul] moves through this white fluid and not through [a process of] radiation [as the ancients thought]. The ancients did not discover it because it is the same color as the nerves and does not get exposed.

(206)

Sabuco's theory has been proven partly correct, even though her claim that the kidneys are involved in harboring excess semen is mistaken. Nevertheless, to the extent that she correctly applies her theory of the transmission of *chilo*/cerebrospinal fluid and the brain's role in reproduction, her



contribution to medical theory is significant. Dogmatic medicine based on Aristotle's claim that women are the material cause in reproduction reduced women to a secondary role *vis-a-vis* men as the efficient cause. Sabuco quips that "Aristotle must have been hallucinating when he said that the Sun and a man generate humans" (287). She considers both men and women to be material and efficient causes of generation, saying that "two seeds are needed. If the seed of a male and a female do not coincide, there is no breeding" (152). Both men and women are material and efficient causes of the hereditary characteristics of the children she bears, although the contribution of one parent may be greater than that of the other:

From this mixing of two, a third one appears, which is neither this one nor that one. [. . .] This is how children come out, mixed, who are not [exactly] like the father nor the mother, even though sometimes they are much like one parent. This [latter case] happens because the seed of one of them was stronger and prevailed over the other one, and there was not an equal mixture. Thus, [the child] took shape according to the matter that best prevailed, had stronger qualities, and was more abundant. But the norm is to come out mixed.

(152)

### *Not the Heart, but the Brain*

Sabuco was critical of the failure of traditional medicine to successfully treat disease, to enable people to live relatively healthy, pain-free natural lifespans, and to die a natural death. According to her theory the failure of medical science was due to its lack of foundation in empirically observable facts. The observable facts show that it is not the Vitruvian Man-like symmetry or asymmetry of bodily organs that creates or disrupts human healthy function, but the brain's response to external unsuitable substances that contact the body. Sabuco says that in response, the brain produces *chilo* that is "corrupted or spoiled" (79).

*Chilo* is a term that occurs nearly 500 times in *New Philosophy*. It is a core concept of Sabuco's medicine with a unique meaning. Authors, including Martin-Araguz, have referred to Sabuco's *chilo* (in modern Spanish, *quilo*) as *succo nerveo* (nerve juice or nerve sap) (Martin-Araguz 2003). This translation suggests that *chilo* is produced by nerves, or found only in nerves. Sabuco's *chilo* has been translated by Pomata (Sabuco 2010, *inter alia*) as "chyle." But "chyle" refers to digestive secretion of lipids that are absorbed by the lacteals, converted into lymph and transmitted throughout the body via the bloodstream. Therefore, "chyle" would refer only to one of the configurations taken by Sabuco's *chilo*.

Sabuco identifies the brain as the source of *chilo* and its *pia mater* membrane as the distributor of *chilo* throughout the body (Sabuco 2007, 65). She expressly identifies as varieties of *chilo* saliva (194), eructation (194),



tears (76, 214), sweat (76, 214), mucus (76), cerumen (76), lymph (114), semen (206), vaginal secretions (206), and chyle (79). There are less liquid forms of *chilo*: fat, the myelin sheath of nerves, and the *pia mater* and *dura mater* membranes (65). Sabuco's theory implies that *chilo* also has other configurations, perhaps other whitish tissues such as the intestines, tendons, etc. There are more gaseous forms as well: moonbeams which we absorb percutaneously (273) and by digesting plants and animals whose growth is affected by the moon (*ibid*). Thus, according to Oliva Sabuco human health is *selenocentric*: dependent upon the moon. It is a well-established medical phenomenon that menstrual cycles mimic the lunar cycle with more women menstruating at new moon and full moon than on any other days of the month (Law 1986). It was only in the late 20th and early 21st centuries that large-scale empirical studies called into question whether at full moon and new moon, there is a surge not only in suicides and homicides, but also in the number of people experiencing psychotic episodes (Markowitz 2009), when, as Sabuco notes, "people go out of their gourds" (Sabuco 2007, 200). Sabuco's theory may be mistaken insofar as *chilo*/cerebrospinal fluid does not derive from the moon, but it hardly seems more far-fetched a claim than that we derive Vitamin D from the sun.

How is the chyle in the brain transubstantiated into *chilo*? It gets exposed to the mind's memory of the Platonic forms. Sabuco's character Antonio explains to the shepherd Rodonio:

Have you seen a mirror that can represent everything that is in front of it? Well, those images and noncorporeal appearances that do not occupy space are called forms. These enter through the sight in this manner: that image of the thing that we look at appears and hits the transparent vitreous of the eye, and that noncorporeal image passes through the vitreous that is the eye and runs through a small tube (which is a hollow nerve) to the common sense (i.e., the first cell of the [brain in the] forehead). When it arrives, it is considered and examined through the understanding [and] is judged, and the result is transmitted to the will. The will also is there [in the brain] and not in the heart, which is a carnal member unsuited for the forms.

(102)

the brain [. . .] needs to absorb the nutrients of the food in order to perform its job of taking [from the digestive system] and giving to its trunk and limbs. Through attraction, chyle easily rises from the stomach to the brain, where it is transubstantiated into *chilo*.

(243)

The transubstantiated *chilo* is expelled by the brain's *pia mater*, distributed via the nervous system throughout the body, and sent back to the brain in the same manner.



Sabuco's philosophy of medicine is significant in the history of medicine regarding her conclusion that epilepsy was a disease of the brain, not caused by spirits. She revived the disputed view of Hippocrates (Hippocrates 2009) that the brain was the locus of epileptic seizures, not the heart. Convinced that her theory was valid and that her evidence supported the view that the rational soul or mind existed in the brain rather than the heart, Sabuco was convinced that Hippocrates, and not the followers of Aristotle were correct about epilepsy. She contended that epilepsy was a disease of the brain (Sabuco 2007, 192). She discussed seizures as events that the brain is unaware of because it lacks the ability to comprehend its own internal states (167). In her view, seizures are caused by a sudden excessive drainage of cerebrospinal fluid or *chilo* from the brain. She alone among her contemporaries considered that the brain controlled all bodily movements and organ functions through its distribution of *chilo* throughout the body, she concluded that the brain, not the heart, is responsible for epileptic seizures (192).

Lastly, one of the most provocative of Sabuco's arguments is that one of the forms that *chilo* takes is as "white blood," an observation that is presented as part of her claim that the brain is responsible for the production of blood and is aided in the production and distribution of blood by the liver and the heart (195). A claim of "distribution" is not the same as a theory of circulation, but is consistent with that latter concept. William Harvey, who in 1610 prosecuted Bradwell for recommending Sabuco's theory, in 1628 provided the first empirical evidence of the circulation of the blood (Harvey 1628, Ch. 9, 13) something very close to Sabuco's hypothesis. It is not known whether, before she died Sabuco learned of Harvey's evidence, but she would have applauded his use of empirical method to support his hypothesis.

Medical science had everything to gain and nothing to lose by abandoning its failed paradigms and dogmatic theories. Humans, including Oliva Sabuco, had everything to gain: health and a natural lifespan ending in a peaceful, gentle death. But she had a reputation to lose were her theory proven wrong.

## 2. Personal Freedom When There's Everything to Lose

Oliva Sabuco had a relationship with her father to lose if she published *Nveva Filosofia* devoid of thanks for his help. She had her freedom to lose if she published it without permission of the royal authorities, and her life to lose if the Church deemed it heretical. In this section, I show how these risks are inter-related.

### A. *The Unfree Status of Women*

Spain was not a unified nation during Sabuco's era. Laws and customs varied even within the kingdom of Felipe II. Non-aristocratic women exercised



personal and legal freedom only with the consent of their fathers (if unmarried) or husbands. Legal documents from the vicinity where Oliva Sabuco lived were not signed by non-widowed women without the co-signature of the spouse, and were not signed by single women without the co-signature of their father or a male relative acting in his stead. Before her marriage in 1580 (AHDA 1580), Oliva Sabuco had scant legal or political freedoms other than those granted by her father. Women's legal freedoms were in most cases nominal, formalities, niceties, not real.

As Allyson Poska explains:

Once married, although technically husbands controlled their wives' dowries, women did not necessarily relinquish all access to that wealth. Not all husbands asserted their rights over their wives' wealth and contracts show married women using their own property and transacting business with the permission of (or sometimes in the absence of) husbands.

(Poska 2008, 11)

She risked a lot, and it may appear that Oliva Sabuco had everything to lose by exercising her freedom to publish *Nueva Filosofia de la Naturaleza del Hombre*. But she did nothing wrong by publishing it, and its offense to Church teachings was not great. After the fact, we see that Oliva Sabuco had nothing left to lose by publishing her theory. The story is a complicated one that involves her dysfunctional family, a highly regulated, new book-printing industry, control of which marked a power struggle between the Church and the State, and a society in which women had few social or legal rights. The primary risk to Oliva's freedom came from an attempt by the family patriarch, Miguel Sabuco to take credit for the authorship of the book. Her story reads like a soap opera. Below, I offer only the most salient details.

### ***B. Liberation From Patriarchal Oppression***

Fewer than half a dozen Spanish women of this period wrote philosophy, and only one, Oliva Sabuco, wrote a philosophy of medicine. In 16th-century Spain, women were expected to be illiterate (Romero-Perez 1997). Juan Luis Vives advised that women's education be limited to domestic skills; only female royalty ought to be literate (Vives n.d.).

King Felipe II occasionally spent winters in Sabuco's home town, Alcaraz. It boasted numerous physicians (including Oliva's godfather) and apothecaries (including Oliva's father and, later, her brother). The philosopher-grammarian who translated Aristotle Pedro Simón-Abril also lived there. The town had many lawyers, including Sabuco's neighbor Juan de Sotomayor, a priest who wrote laudatory poems about her that appear in the book's front material (Sabuco 2007, 43); Sotomayor was attorney for



Alcaraz's largest Church, Santissima Trinidad. He signed many Sabuco family legal documents.

In Alcaraz, boys were educated at a Jesuit grammar school. Girls received their primary education by the (now cloistered) nuns of the Conventa de Santa Magdalena (Anonymous 1997) and their secondary education from the Sisters of Saint Dominic del Espiritu Santo at their convent for girls in Alcaraz (Pretel-Marin 1999, 198 n.40). Oliva Sabuco likely received her early education at these convents. That foundation plus access to her father's library (and perhaps that of her godfather, Doctor Heredia) would give her the opportunity to read philosophy and the history of medicine.

Sabuco's mother died when Sabuco was in her teens. Her father was busy as one of the town's few pharmacists. Oliva Sabuco may well have found herself with freedom to read and write. I think that while her father waited to settle the estate of his late wife as well as to amass a dowry so as to marry her off, young Oliva Sabuco turned to reading his books. She extols the virtues of solitude, of relaxing outdoors in a bucolic natural setting (Sabuco 2007, 98). Perhaps that is exactly what she did, Plato in hand. She knew several Platonic dialogues, the commentary literature on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (if not the work itself), Pliny's multivolume *Natural History*, and numerous other classical works. Evidence of her learnedness is in her numerous marginal citations to these authors (Sabuco 1587 *inter alia*).

In her Letter to the King, she hints that she had "some time ago" discussed her views with educated local men and now feared being plagiarized. She notes,

[I]f perhaps on the strength of some comments I might have made some time ago regarding this material, someone writes or has [already] written about these truths of my invention and usurps them from me, I do supplicate Your Catholic Majesty to order him to desist.

(45)

She likely was well-known in Alcaraz long before the publication of her book.

Seven months before Oliva's wedding, Miguel married their servant, Ana Navarro García (AHDA/AHZ Amenostaciones 103 1580), a woman of Oliva's age whose father had died indebted to Miguel and whose mother had been entered into a convent in return for a payment of 7,000 maravedis to Miguel (AHDA/AHZ 150 1573). Having married Ana, Miguel was obligated to provide her with a dowry with which to survive widowhood. Eight years lapsed before he made that provision in his Will.

An erudite woman like Oliva Sabuco had valuable social cachet. Marriage into a locally prominent family would reflect well on her and on her father. Miguel entered into a binding dowry letter with the owners of vast salt mines, the parents of Acacio de Buedo. We don't know the amount promised by the dowry letter. Miguel tells us that he didn't pay it until well



after Oliva's 1580 wedding, not until after the couple sued him to collect and settled for 52,500 maravedis (Sabuco 2007, 324). Miguel never paid Ana Garcia her dowry (*ibid*).

In 1585, the estate of Oliva's mother, Francisca de Cozar, was distributed (AHA/ALC 150). Oliva and her brother Alonso received a two-building residence whose second story straddles the street like an overpass. Alonso Sabuco donated his half to the adjacent City Hall. Oliva donated her half to the adjacent Dominican convent that likely educated her. The fact that she donated the building rather than selling it suggests that she had already received her dowry and therefore had the funds with which to undertake the publication of her book.

Was *Nueva Filosofía de la Naturaleza del Hombre* drafted by 1585? I believe that before Sabuco was betrothed in 1580 she was discussing her theory with educated people of her acquaintance: her father Miguel Sabuco, her godfather, Doctor Heredia, the parish priest and lawyer Juan de Sotomayor, and her neighbor the philosopher-grammarian Pedro Simon-Abril. Possibly, hand-written drafts of the work were circulating amongst this group. If, as I have argued, she received her dowry by 1585, she at last had the funds in hand to travel across the la Mancha desert to her publisher in Madrid, Pedro Madrigal. She would need to pay him the up-front costs of paper, ink, and typesetting. This would be followed by travel further north to San Lorenzo de l'Escorial, the royal seat, pay fees to government functionaries and submit the bound, uncirculated proofs for review by the *Consejo Royal*. On July 23, 1586, that Council granted permission to print and sell copies (Sabuco 2007 41–2). On February 12, 1587, the Royal Notary established the tax for the book. It could now legally be sold. As I show in Section E. below, that was scant comfort for any author or publisher in Spain at the height of the Inquisition.

### C. *Risks to Well-Being Due to Miguel's Greed*

The dowry lawsuit settlement of 52,500 maravedis must have irked Miguel Sabuco. But nothing irked him as much as Oliva's insult: nowhere in the book is he mentioned. There was no "thank you for my early education," no "thank you for allowing me to read all the classical works of philosophy and medicine in your library," no "thank you for allowing me to discuss my ideas with educated men." Why does Miguel receive no mention in Sabuco's book? I would hypothesize that Oliva was angered by his refusal to pay her dowry.

In the early years of their marriage, Acacio de Buedo was a *Caballero de la Sierra*—commanding wintertime troop patrols of the frontier against the repeated invasions by the Moors. Oliva's risk of being widowed young with children to raise was real. By reneging on paying her dowry, Miguel Sabuco put his daughter at risk of poverty in case that occurred. (Her in-laws had neither legal nor customary responsibility for her.) Oliva Sabuco



had nothing left to lose with respect to her relationship with her father by omitting all mention of him in her manuscript. Infuriated by her disrespect he drew up a will in which he retaliated. He stated that he had written the work whose title he could not correctly remember. He threatened Oliva with “his curse” if she denied him its royalties.

#### *D. Risks Created by the Government*

Oliva could not have published the work in Miguel's name even if she wanted to. Her publisher would be punished, as would she. The royal *permiso* states:

We mandate that during this period no one may print it without your permission. If someone prints or sells it in any of our kingdoms, he will be penalized with the loss of all the books, molds and ancillary [printing equipment] and a fine will be exacted of fifty thousand maravedis each time it is done otherwise. A third of the said fine will go to our chamber, another third for the denouncer, and another third for the judge who will pass sentence.

And We command the members of the Council, president and court clerks, chairmen of the council, constables of our House, Court and Chancelleries, and all the King's marshals, assistants, governors, high and ordinary mayors and other judges and justices from wherever cities, towns and territories of our Kingdoms and dominions, the same for these who now are [in office] as for those that will be, that they are to keep and respect this warrant and the privilege that We are granting you. They should not yield, nor pass, nor consent in any way [to any claim] against its gist, form and content, under threat of punishment at our mercy and a fine of ten thousand maravedis paid to our Chamber.

(Sabuco 2007, 42)

#### *E. Threat to Personal Freedom and Freedom of Thought: The Inquisition*

Every diocese of the Catholic Church had its own Commission of the Inquisition. Any of those Commissions of Inquisition could examine the book, impound it, order it not to be sold unless corrections were made. Usually, the examiner would simply excise passages (sometimes with a razor, sometimes with black ink). Different exemplars of Sabuco's book are differently corrected. Some merely contain marginalia instructing the reader how a passage is to be understood. Others have whole passages crossed out (3). Punishment could range from confiscation of the book, its becoming listed on the Index of prohibited books, to fines, imprisonment, and death. Oliva Sabuco and her husband lived around the corner from Alcaraz' House of the



Inquisition (129 n.203). As a teen, she had witnessed an *auto da fe* including a massive book-burning on the town square, in front of her home. Home-town inquisitors examined *Nueva Filosofía* but we do not know when. Editions one and two are included on the Index of Prohibited Books published in 1640 (by which time she probably was dead). The book itself is not prohibited. It lists 17 passages to be expurgated (Index 2, 814–15).

Additional risks were posed by various Committees of Inquisition, any one of which could censor or ban the book and could fine, imprison, or execute her for heresy. She and her husband lived around the corner from Alcaraz's Casa del Inquisition. Its very proximity and unchallengeable power represented great threats to the immense dowry that was Oliva Sabuco's personal property and to Oliva Sabuco herself, should they take a stricter view of her theory.

### F. *Nothing Left to Lose, Genuine Freedom to Gain*

After publishing *Nueva Filosofía de la Naturaleza del Hombre*, Oliva Sabuco lived a vibrant social life. She and her husband were godparents to children of several of Alcaraz's civil government officials (AHDA/ALZ 3 n.d.). They were witnesses to marriages of the sons and daughters of local officials and signatories to business contracts. Sabuco signed many legal documents (Gonzalez 2008), including contracts to lease vast expanses of land to tenant farmers, and to permit ranchers to pasture their cattle on properties that she and Acacio owned. Acacio de Buedo repeatedly was re-elected to public office, ultimately becoming Alcalde Mayor, the Chief Mayor of Alcaraz.

## Conclusion

In the stifflingly *machismo* culture of 16th-century Spain, Oliva Sabuco had nothing left to lose by exercising intellectual and personal freedom. She used what freedom she had to emancipate 16th-century medical practice from the dominance of Aristotelianism and to emancipate herself and her finances from the control of her father. Truly, freedom was just another word for nothing left to lose. And everything to gain.

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# 4 Complaisance and the Question of Autonomy in the French Women Moralists, 1650–1710

*Andreas Blank*

## 1. Introduction

The character trait of complaisance—the inclination to please others—figures prominently in 17th- and early 18th-century French moral thought. In contrast to character traits that were unambiguously regarded either as virtuous or as vicious, the categorization of complaisance was highly controversial. A widely shared intuition was that without complaisance life in society would be difficult. Another intuition was that complaisance indicates a conformist state of mind, is inseparably tied to lowly flattery and, at worst, invites contempt.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, while some early modern thinkers treat complaisance as a gender-neutral topic, a specifically gendered type of complaisance became a prominent topic in early modern moral philosophy: the form of complaisance associated with the female character of a “coquette.” A coquette was understood as a woman who behaves in a way calculated to trigger feelings of love without the intention of binding herself to anyone.<sup>2</sup> Like complaisance in general, coquetry is designed to trigger positive emotional responses from others and, in this sense, accepts dependence on others; at the same time, it is also a strategy for remaining independent from others in the sense of avoiding serious commitments. Of course, the term “autonomy” does not occur in the early modern controversy over complaisance and coquetry. But the contrary of autonomy—dependence on the preferences, decisions and judgments of others—is certainly a concept that lies at the heart of this controversy. In this sense, the early modern controversy over complaisance and coquetry can be understood as a controversy over the question of personal autonomy.

In what follows, I will focus on three early modern French women moralists who played a significant role in these debates: Madeleine de Scudéry (1607–1701), Jeanne-Michelle de Pringy,<sup>3</sup> and Françoise d’Aubigné, Marquise de Maintenon (1635–1713). I will focus on these authors because in their writings, the difficulties arising from the conflict between the desire to please and the desire to be independent are thought through vividly, with an emphasis on gender issues and with widely diverging conclusions. Interest in these three women, perhaps, lies not so much in that they had reached



definitive, context-independent results but rather that they had thought through some perennial problems within the framework of the society of the *Ancien Régime*. The literary forms of their works, too, are closely linked with the cultural context in which they were active. Scudéry, of course, was one of the leading 17th-century novelists, and her novels *Cyrus* and *Clélie* develop around extensive conversations in an idealized setting of Roman antiquity. Some of the texts that she subsequently published as separate conversations about moral issues originate from these novels and are supplemented by further philosophical dialogues.<sup>4</sup> Maintenon, too, uses the dialogue form, but her much shorter and concise dialogues revolve around the educational aspirations of the college at Saint-Cyr that her husband, Louis XIV, founded on her initiative for girls from impoverished noble families.<sup>5</sup> Finally, Pringy uses the literary form of “characters” that goes back to antiquity and has been made popular in early modern France by moralists such as Jean de La Bruyère.<sup>6</sup>

Section 2 will explore some aspects of Madame de Maintenon’s treatment of the role of complaisance in holding together aristocratic society. These aspects will make evident how pervasive the role of complaisance was in early modern France, and, at the same time, they will indicate how little room for personal independence the prevailing concept of complaisance left especially for women. As Maintenon emphasizes against a variety of objections that she takes into consideration, this is so because complaisance does not reduce to inoffensive ways of speaking but rather involves the readiness to subject one’s own will to the will of others. In her view complaisance is, in a sense still to be explicated, a rational strategy for acting in situations of dependence.

Section 3 uses the work of Jeanne-Michelle de Pringy to illustrate that not all women moralists of the *Ancien Régime* were happy with such an affirmative attitude toward dependence. Pringy was one of the fiercest critics of the form of complaisance characteristic of the female coquette. Her criticism is closely connected with her analysis of female self-love and the pathologies of the economy of esteem that reinforce this vice. Pringy does not have anything commendatory to say about complaisance, and her advice to women is to replace complaisance entirely with virtuous character traits that could give rise to justified esteem. The independence of women from misguided standards of esteem clearly is a crucial concern in Pringy; still, one misses the realism salient in Maintenon’s thought, and also one might ask whether some forms of complaisance—even if Pringy might be right about the pathological forms—may not be able to contribute something positive to achieving greater independence.

This is one of the questions discussed more than once in Madeleine de Scudéry’s novels and dialogues. Section 4 will take her distinction between detrimental forms of complaisance and what she calls “complaisance honnête” as a vantage point. In particular, it will explore the sense in which Scudéry connects rational complaisance to the concept of *honnêteté* that has



led to controversial interpretations among her commentators. Contrary to one interpretation, I will argue that *honnêteté*, for Scudéry, does not reduce to acting according to the norms of gallant life; contrary to an alternative interpretation, I will argue that Scudéry also does not reduce *honnêteté* to acting according to the moral norms of paternal authority. The latter point becomes clear in her exploration of a possible positive form of female coquetry—a form that she calls “coquetry of friendship.”

## 2. Maintenon on Complaisance and Dependence

Maintenon regards complaisance as one of the conditions of living in society: “To be fit for Society . . . requires Complaisance, good Nature, and good Manners” (Maintenon 1758, 2). She describes a woman fit for society as follows:

She has a proper Share of Wit, is sweet temper'd [*douce*], obliging [*complaisante*], conformable to the Dispositions of others, willing to engage in any Diversion with her Companions, tho' not perhaps suitable to her Taste; [. . .] she listens attentively to what is said to her, and doth not intrude upon the Attention of others, by talking too long at a Time [. . .]; she never enquires into what doth not concern her, is never angry, and doth not repeat what appears displeasing to another; she commends what deserves Praise, and is silent with Respect to any Error she discovers.

(Ibid., 3)

Thus, for Maintenon, complaisance does not reduce to saying nice things; rather, it also involves emotional self-control, the readiness to do what is favorable for upholding the esteem of others and, most of all, the readiness to subordinate the own will to the will of others, both in matters of what others want her to do and what others want her to know.

In Maintenon's dialogues, the concept of complaisance is part of a field of concepts such as respect (*égard*) and affability (*douceur*), which exhibit similar structures. As she characterizes it, respect is an attitude that includes the readiness to accommodate oneself to the tastes and preferences of others, no matter how bizarre these tastes and preferences may seem to be (ibid., 31). For instance, accommodating oneself to the taste of others includes being attentive to musical and literary performances in which one takes no interest (ibid., 32). Also the concept of affability (*douceur*) denotes this readiness to cut back on one's own convictions readily, as illustrated by the following description of a woman exemplifying this quality:

I have seen this Conduct practised by a Lady of extraordinary good Sense, but somewhat prejudiced in Favour of her own Opinion; she argued with a Vivacity natural to her, intermixed with a little Conceit,



and it was visible she thought herself properly qualified to convince her Antagonist; notwithstanding which, she suddenly yielded to the Force of a well-grounded Argument, was at once herself convinced, and acknowledged frankly, she had been to blame.

(Ibid., 66–67)

Affability thus brings with it the readiness to give up on a controversy on the occasion of the first strong argument of the opponent—certainly a good strategy to secure sympathy but also a strategy that precludes the formulation of well-founded rejoinders. This is why it is not surprising to see that Maintenon is aware of the high degree of dependence that the ideal of complaisance and affability brings with it for women:

[W]e are not always Mistresses of ourselves to regulate our Conduct by Reason, and we are sometimes obliged to espouse a Cause, which Reason would not approve; we depend on the Will of others; a Husband might be apt to be too profuse in his Expences, without considering the Damage he thereby sustains in his Fortune; and a Mother sends us abroad into the World, when Reason, if consulted, might perhaps advise Retirement.

(Ibid., 8)

Accepting dependence on the power of husbands and parents also determines the sense in which complaisance can be understood as rational: “[R]eason draws Advantages from every Circumstance, and in the Instances you have selected, it will be found to comply with the Dispositions of those on whom it depends” (ibid.). Thus, the kind of reason connected with complaisance is a kind of instrumental reason that seeks the best results by adapting to conditions of dependence.

In fact, dependence is a topic to which Maintenon has devoted a dialogue of its own. In this dialogue, students who are about to graduate from Saint-Cyr, the college for girls from impoverished noble families founded on Maintenon’s initiative in 1684, have an exchange with a more experienced lady, and in the course of the conversation the students’ expectation that they will have much more personal liberties after having graduated from college is crushed by the confrontation with the realities of aristocratic life. For instance, the widely accepted convention that unmarried young women have to be accompanied by a chamber maid when they go to public places makes it necessary to accommodate oneself to the needs of the servant (ibid., 76). Likewise, the convention that unmarried young women have to be accompanied on private visits by a friend of the mother makes it necessary to accommodate oneself to the plans of friends of the family (ibid.). The convention of not dining without the father implies a lot of waiting, and the complicated nature of an aristocratic household implies dependence on the services of household employees (ibid.). Even worse, being part of



an aristocratic society depends on the precarious status of being a favorite of high-ranking personalities (ibid., 77). And the often contested economic situation of noble families implies a dependence on legal experts (ibid., 78). Maintenon uses these considerations to substantiate a general point, namely, “[t]hat even Men depend upon one another, and Women much more so; our Sex is weak, and requires Assistance and Protection, and this is so evidently apparent, that we dare not live in a House by ourselves” (ibid.).

The acceptance of dependence is also built into Maintenon’s concept of what she calls a “*honnête femme*” (ibid., 81; 96). In fact, while the corresponding term “*honnête homme*” is ubiquitous in the French literature and philosophy of the 17th and 18th centuries (see Magendie 1925; Bury 1996), her dialogues contain some of the relatively few occurrences of the term “*honnête femme*.” And while the diverging meanings of “*honnête homme*” have found extensive attention from commentators, there is only very little work on the meanings of “*honnête femme*.” Alison Turner argues that *honnêteté* in the sense of gallantry—“the desire to please without subservience, courtesy with a dash of boldness in it”—is only something for men (Turner 1966, 167). She notes that in Pierre Corneille’s play *Polyeucte* (1643) one finds a diverging conception of *honnêteté* that expresses a specifically female role model. According to her reading of Corneille, the demands of obedience and the demands of honor do not always coincide, and Corneille’s figure of Pauline derives its dramatic potential from her resolution to protect her feeling of honor, where the demands of honor and obedience conflict (ibid., 169). Turner describes the character of Pauline in Corneille’s tragedy *Polyeucte* as follows:

Two of the strongest qualities in Pauline’s character are her sense of obedience or duty to father and husband and her sense of her moral reputation or *gloire*. [. . .] If there is a distinction to be found between the *honnête homme* and the *honnête femme*, it would seem to lie in the emphasis given to these particular aspects of *honnêteté*; in the woman, because of her dependence on man’s protection, the stress on obedience and duty must of necessity be far greater.

(Ibid., 167)

In this sense, the concept of *honnête femme* seems to involve an acquiescence with a high degree of dependence on men.

Maintenon’s treatment of the concept of *honnête femme* falls fully into this pattern. In her dialogue on *gloire*, one finds a conception of honor that is bound to moral virtues such as courage, fidelity, and gratefulness, and Maintenon is unambiguous that such a conception of honor should guide the behavior not only of men but also of women (Maintenon 1758, 23–24). At the same time, she develops a disturbingly affirmative attitude toward dependence. In her dialogue on marriage, the bewildering claim that the best husbands are those who are tyrannous is discussed as follows:



*Sophia.* Why do you imagine all men are Tyrants?

*Lucinda.* Because the Duties of Wife are tyrannical, and a Husband, however indulgent he may be, will insist on your being a good Wife [*honnête femme*].

*Melissa.* In what then do you suppose the Duty of a good Wife [*honnête épouse*] consists?

*Chariclea.* In neglecting herself, and studying only the Good of her Family.

(Ibid., 81)<sup>7</sup>

As is explained later on in the dialogue, forgetting oneself involves complaisance in the sense of cutting back on one's own will:

A good Wife [*honnête femme*] rises early, that she may have the more Time for her Business, she begins the Day with Prayer, she gives Orders to her Servants, looks after her Children, takes Care of their Education, prepares herself to receive Gentlemen, whom her Husband sometimes brings Home with him to Dinner, who perhaps are not very agreeable to her Liking she is herself the best Servant she has about her in getting every Thing ready; when Dinner is over, she stays with the Company against her will.

(Ibid., 81–82)

Maintenon's acceptance of female dependence also plays a central role in her characterization of the role of religiously grounded virtue. This becomes clear when, in her dialogue on self-love, she discusses the question of whether young girls should act out of the desire for being praised or out of love for virtue. The intuition that the desire for being praised inspires many virtuous actions is weighed against the intuition that love for virtue is too rarely what motivates action (ibid., 24–26). The central question turns out to be: “[W]ould you not have us careful to please, and seek the Esteem of those on whom we depend?” (ibid., 15). This question triggers a series of remarks. First, acting on this desire should not be hindered, but nevertheless it would be commendable to act “on a more substantial View” (ibid.): “[W]hat is Morality, when it has not Religion for its Basis? You are, I see, still resolved to gain only the good Opinion of Men, and that alone will never constitute our Happiness” (ibid.). This thought leads Maintenon to a strange conclusion that combines the acceptance of dependence in acting with the idea that moral virtue could provide an independent source of self-esteem:

You will never be in Pain to Procure the Good-Will of Men; your Conscience will justify you in doing your Duty;—if Men approve your Actions, their Approbation is welcome; if not, you may console yourself, being still certain of obtaining those Praises which have no End. [. . .] You may be careful of your own Happiness, and indulge every innocent



Enjoyment, and then you will be sure that you have not exceeded the proper Bounds of this Self-Esteem, while you continue to act in a State of Dependence [*lorsque vous agirez avec dépendance*].

(Ibid., 16; translation modified)

Thus, Maintenon regards piety-based morality as an independent source for upholding a positive self-image in the face of adversity, but not as a source for acting independently of the will of men. All that she acknowledged on the level of action is a certain restraining function of what conscience demands. Or, to put it differently: Conscience keeps acting from a dependent position within the boundaries of religiously inspired virtue. Evidently, this is something very different from acting independently of the will of others.

### 3. Pringy on the Self-Refuting Nature of Coquetry

Not all women of aristocratic society in the *Ancien Régime* accepted acting from such a dependent position, and one strategy of carving out a space of personal liberty is often associated with the figure of the “coquette,” to which Jeanne-Michelle de Pringy and Madelaine de Scudéry have devoted detailed considerations. Pringy provides an analysis of what exactly may be problematic about coquetry, and thereby brings to light problematic sides of complaisance that are hardly discussed by Maintenon. I will deal with Pringy’s view in this section and then turn to Scudéry in the following section.

What exactly makes a woman a “coquette”? One characteristic mentioned by Pringy is the wish to fulfill sensual needs or “to satisfy the sensitive part, without consulting what duty and reason can allege to the contrary; their principal care and study is to satisfy and caress the predominant Passion, and to make the Mind an Instrument, and privy to these irregularities of the Heart” ([Pringy] 1696, 5). This passage suggests an antagonism between reason and passion—a dichotomy that in fact plays an important role in Pringy’s thought. But Pringy’s characterization of the “coquette” goes beyond invoking such an antagonism and also includes the wish to please:

[H]er whole time is taken up with how to please, and her greatest *Elogium* is to be very critical in such Maxims. This is the usual product of *Juvenile* years ill employ’d, which has no other Instruction but Self-love, and to be very little acquainted with it self, it piles up a Ground-work of perfection to the gust of Self-love.

(Ibid., 3)

Moreover, she takes the form that the desire to please takes in the *Coquette* to be self-refuting:



There is no extreme but a *Coquette* will plunge her self into: She's prodigal in her Disbursement, and penurious in her Parcimony; for Vertue being at so great a distance, the Golden Mean can never be found out; if she's Amorous, though the Fit never lasts long, she's for that instant just Distracted. [. . .] And the Union of all these affrighting qualities may seem to please when accompany'd with so much Assiduity, yet a complaisant carriage can never so far seduce men to make them Slaves to a false Merit; but in requital the Woman pays dear for the Law which she imposes, and as the Love which inspires her is made up of Interest [. . .], the fruit of this Familiarity is the ruin of the Fortune of the Man, and eclipses the Honour of the Woman.

(Ibid., 6–7)

The wish to please and its self-refuting nature are topics that are discussed in more detail in Pringy's analysis of self-love, to which she devotes an appendix. There, she sets out "to describe this *Passion* in the Female Sex" (ibid., 73), and as the passage from the essay on the "coquette" indicates, she has many critical things to say about self-love. Her view is not that this passion is different in women than in men; still, she believes that it is particularly predominant in women. She describes the occasions that give rise to expressions of self-love and the effects brought about by them as mutually reinforcing:

On such an Occasion Effects nourish the cause, this *Self-love* produces wicked sentiments, which produce a thousand unjust and unreasonable actions. Now these unreasonable actions by turns retain the Soul enslav'd to these Sentiments, which return in course to their primitive source and Original.

(ibid., 91)

What kind of sentiments and actions does she have in mind? Consider the following passage:

How should she be capable of Deliberation, or worthy of Trust, if her softness won't suffer her to keep it a secret for those she professes most kindness, nor undauntedly maintain the Truth to the faces of such she is afraid of, indeed this is an evident proof of self Love in the fair Sex. [. . .] [W]e can't frame our mind into such a Heroick Temper to speak our minds candidly of others, and we abscond that esteem our Friend has for us, when he unbosoms a swelling Secret. [. . .] She flatters her self (though without any Reason) that much glory will accrue by her Indiscretion, and much Benefit and advantage by a Complaisant carriage and Deportment.

(Ibid., 90–91)



Thus, one pattern of action deriving from self-love is the reluctance to tell the truth. Another is the incapacity to keep secrets. Both patterns are clearly connected with the wish to please that plays a central role in Pringy's characterization of the "coquette": Not telling the truth is meant to avoid displeasing others; chatting about secrets is meant to please others. Obviously, breaking secrets is bound to destroy the esteem that friends held for the one to whom they confided their secrets. Nor will the calculation prove to be reliable that pleasing others will compensate this loss with higher esteem from others.

Self-love also leads to an impairment of the ability to judge justly about oneself: "That Justice which she pleads for in other matters, she won't hear of in her own; and when she thinks by examining, to regulate the Affair, she runs a risque of disordering it so much the more, because that *Self-love* blinds her Reflections" (ibid., 80). Similarly, self-love leads to an inability to do justice to others:

This is the pernicious Consequence of *Self-love* which must be own'd to be a Cardinal evil which includes all the rest. [. . .] [F]or seeing Justice is so necessary for all conditions, it cannot subsist where *Self-love* erects its Throne, for she always takes Pleasures part, without considering that submission which the body owes to the mind, and those indispensable Obligations we are liable unto in such cases to do violence to our inferior Appetites, that we may be just.

(Ibid., 91–92)

Pringy identifies the problem that, in the long run, complaisance may be unsuitable to secure genuine esteem from others:

This is the dire misfortune which attends them, quickness of Apprehension makes them inconstant; a solid Judgment takes the greater delight in Mischief, if penetrating the more Satyrical, and more visible Defects renders them the more contemptible, which they obtain for the guerdon and reward of their over-weening and imaginary Merit. We esteem them, as much as they love, that is, for a Moment. Beauty surprises, Wit is very pleasing in Conversation, but then such defects shock the noblest Disposition.

(Ibid., 5–6)

Still, we do not have an explanation for why Pringy believes that unjustified self-love and self-esteem are more pressing problems for women than for men. Why is it that women encounter more profound obstacles to pursuing their interests? As we have seen, her answer has to do with the difficulties of reaching realistic self-esteem. But the problem of self-knowledge, for her, is closely connected with gender roles. In her view, these are by no means vices devoid of a social basis. For instance, she emphasizes the role



that the response of others has in the vice of avarice: “[T]he fair Sex are but too prone to that sort of Avarice which *Self-love* produces; men are valu’d according to the Figure they make in the World, and abundance of Self is the key of their Esteem” (ibid., 94). Likewise, complaisance is driven by the wish to submit one’s will to those who are admired for their wealth: “to obtain the Esteem of such persons whom the World reputes to be so, and this in prospect of securing or advancing their Reputation, being sensible that Esteem depends from the voice of those whom Opulence makes men caress and admire” (ibid., 93–94). Thus, misguided self-esteem, for Pringy, is not just a matter of female *self*-deception. Rather, it is shaped through what other people erroneously value, both for themselves and when they pass judgments of esteem about others. As her remarks indicate, she takes the standards according to which such judgments are formed to be specifically male. Thus, in her view, complaisant behavior is not just a spontaneous female vice but rather responds to these male standards for esteeming others.

Analyzing the mechanisms that stand behind the communicative strategies of the coquette in this way makes clear how problematic the dependence that expresses itself in some forms of complaisance actually is. No wonder, then, that the advice that Pringy gives women is to abandon complaisance altogether and to replace it through the pursuit of virtue:

[A]nd through Inclination, Education and Custom, three strong Links seem to render such a change almost impossible, the relish of good would return again, Religion and Honour would not be unsuccessful, and the unspeakable satisfaction of being well thought on, would return in the lieu of Complacency. For Virtue will have due Honour paid it where ever it appears, whether Wisdom preserves it inviolable, or Reason on account of its Amability be captivated by it, in all places it will allways obtain a venerable Esteem and Regard.

(Ibid., 7)

Unlike for Maintenon, for Pringy, virtue and piety thus are not motivations that could regulate acting from a dependent position; rather, she sees them as alternatives to complaisance—as alternatives that could fulfill the desire for being esteemed much better than coquetry, which carries the risk of being disesteemed in the long run. Still, what one may miss here is a sense of the demands of social conventions which will make a life without complaisance extremely demanding; one also may miss a sense for the liberating side of coquetry—namely, the possibility of developing a pleasant social life without having to accept the dependencies that arise out of the search for lasting relationships. Isn’t there any way of developing a view of complaisance that is both bound to the demands of virtue and compatible with a sphere of personal autonomy that goes beyond the independence of individual conscience? A look into the work of Madeleine de Scudéry might be instructive here.



#### 4. Scudéry on Complaisance and “Coquetry of Friendship”

Scudéry deals with complaisance in one of her dialogues from the second part of the third volume of *Clélie* (Scudéry 1657). This dialogue is re-published and supplemented with a dialogue on the distinction between flattery and complaisance in her *Conversations sur divers sujets* (1680). Scudéry there uses the term “honnête complaisance” (Scudéry 1680, 281), thereby raising the question of the sense in which she connects complaisance with *honnêteté*. Donna Stanton places Scudéry’s treatment of complaisance in the context of *honnêteté* understood as encompassing the ideals of aristocratic life (Stanton 1980, 133–134). Similarly, Jörn Steigerwald suggests that Scudéry’s talk of “honnête complaisance” relates “exclusively to court society such that only contexts decide about the necessity and possibility of complaisance” (Steigerwald 2011, 124). In his view, what matters for Scudéry is to figure out how the potential of complaisance can be realized most fully in the context of gallant life (*ibid.*, 124; 127). There is a good reason for such an interpretation: What prompts the dialogue is the observation that exaggerated or clumsy complaisance has an effect contrary to the intended one. However, although Scudéry is one of the first authorities concerning matters of gallantry, arguably her treatment of *honnêteté* does not reduce to an analysis of how the effects of certain communicative strategies within a particular social context can be calculated rationally.

This reading is supported by her distinction between different kinds of complaisance. Most relevant for our present concern, there is one kind that she calls “self-minded complaisance” (*complaisance intéressé*). She characterizes the practitioners of this kind of complaisance as people “who have a Complaisance that is Foreign to ’em; and who only approve of all you do, that you may comply with them in all they have a mind to” (Scudéry 1683, 149). This is the context in which flattery can become operative. As she explains it, flattery takes its origin in distorted self-images both of the flatterer and the flatteree:

Those who love to be flattered, esteem ’emselves too much. Flatterers commonly become so, in that being very sensible they have neither Vertue nor Merit sufficient to please or acquire Credit without the help of Flattery, and we may say, they have an ill Opinion, both of themselves and others.

(*ibid.*, 158)

Scudéry sees the flattery-oriented kind of complaisance negatively. Someone who practices such a communicative strategy “never warns his friends of the faults they commit during their good fortune; but if they fall, he is the first to insult over their Calamities, that he may render himself grateful to those who succeed ’em” (*ibid.*, 160). What characterizes such complaisant persons thus is a lack of fidelity:



[O]ne of the most dangerous Complaisances of all [. . .] is that which applauds Detraction and which, very far from defending innocence, suffers it to be basely and unjustly oppress'd. [. . .] [T]hose who are professedly Complaisant, flatter those they see, and abandon those that are absent.

(*ibid.*, 153–154)

In Scudéry's view, there is something self-refuting about this kind of complaisance: "Flatterers [. . .] are afraid, that others should please more than themselves; and 'tis properly in their hearts, that Jealousie may be found without Affection" (*ibid.*, 160). Due to the lack of the capacity for affection, they are incapable of friendship (*ibid.*, 158). What is more, Scudéry regards this kind of complaisance as an expression of a certain kind of dependence: "We ought certainly to look upon Flattery, as a Slave that is ever low, cokesing and depending on Fortune" (*ibid.*, 161).

As Scudéry makes clear, there is another kind of complaisance that is bound to virtue:

Complaisance of the *honnêtes gens* is easie to be discern'd when we take notice of it. It has never any particular interest; it aims in general at the *Convenience* of the world [. . .] There cannot be peculiar Rules for it. Judgment and Vertue must prescribe its Laws.

(*ibid.*, 164, translation modified)

Limiting complaisance in this way to the demands of virtue implies that the realm of complaisance is limited to indifferent matters (*ibid.*, 150). However, being complaisant in indifferent matters is described as having a specifically moral value:

Sometimes submitting one's pleasure to that of others, and a thousand other little things, which without offending reason, and going against justice, serve effectually to meliorate Mankind. And indeed Complaisance can sometimes disarm Anger, appease Fury, and restore Tranquility to an irritated Spirit.

(*ibid.*, 155)

Thus, the question is no so much whether or not Scudéry binds *complaisance honnête* to intellectual and moral virtue but rather what her conception of justice and reason amounts to. In fact, with respect to Scudéry, Magendie has taken a line of interpretation very similar to the line taken by Turner with respect to Corneille. According to Magendie, it would be a misinterpretation to read *Cyrus* as a portrayal of the actual workings of 17th-century French aristocracy.<sup>8</sup> Magendie gives the following characterization of Scudéry's view of female *honnêteté*:



The women in *Cyrus* and *Clélie* have mastered themselves, and do not let themselves be carried away by the heart or the impulses of the senses; they are obedient to reason, to well-being, and they demand that their lovers submit to it, too [. . .]. They jealously preserve their reputation of honor, their *gloire* [. . .]. Virtue is an essential element of this merit. The young girls accept in a docile manner the choice of their parents.

(Magendie 1925, 652; my translation)

Yet, although this interpretation is supported by a tight net of references, reducing Scudéry's conception of *honnêteté* to the aspects that Magendie mentions overlooks Scudéry's lasting fascination with the topic of coquetry. To be sure, by itself coquetry is part of the gallant life; but Scudéry's considerations concerning *complaisance honnête* certainly could be read as putting moral limits on permissible coquetry. As we will see, the conjecture that the moral conception of *honnêteté* is highly relevant here is fully borne out in Scudéry's early discussion of coquetry in *Cyrus*.

To bring out the strengths of her early discussion of coquetry fully, it will be useful to begin with her later, much more skeptical treatment of the same issue in her *Nouvelles Conversations de Morale* (1688). Scudéry there uses the dialogue form to articulate both the attraction of coquetry and the risks that it brings with it for female reputation. Strikingly, much of what goes on in the dialogue makes clear that coquetry in itself cannot be regarded as a vice: at the same time, Scudéry takes the esteem-related risks of coquetry very seriously. This is one of the objections:

[D]oes one not need to have a quite strong inclination to pleasures in general, and to gallantry in particular, not to say exactly to coquetry, in order to put your reputation and your established position at risk as you do? For at the end of the day, [. . .] in this crowd of lovers who chase you and who entertain you, people are quite often a bit jealous of each other and can imagine that you concede more favors to their rivals than to themselves.

(Scudéry 1688, 765)<sup>9</sup>

Clarice, the figure in the dialogue who propagates the attraction of coquetry, defends herself:

I do not love to be loved for the sake of loving; I simply want only to please, to amuse myself and to entertain myself though agreeable bagatelles. I do not search for a husband, and it is easy for you to figure out [. . .] that a person to whom one makes the reproach of loving to have so many slaves would not love to have a master.

(ibid., 770)



Here, the liberating power of coquetry is clearly articulated. Also, the idea that coquetry should be restricted to morally indifferent matters is present. Understood in this way, coquetry unites aspects of the gallant conception of *honnêteté* with aspects of the moral conception, without, however, endorsing any dependency on the power of men.

However, even if the problem of present reputation may be solved by engaging only in morally neutral activities such as poetry and music, there lurks a problem with aging. As one of the figures in the dialogue observes, the coquette overlooks that “within very few years, she will be ridiculous, if she doesn’t change her manners” (ibid., 816). Clarice proposes a solution: “[I]n order not to renounce entirely to my temperament, I make preparations [. . .] to become, if I can, a coquette of friendship as is one of your good friends, who has as great a crowd of friends of all kinds as you say I have of lovers” (ibid., 822). In *Nouvelles Conversations de Morale*, the idea of coquetry of friendship faces two lines of criticism. The first line concerns the nature of complaisance necessary for upholding a large number of friendships: “I would not believe easily that, without a thousand low complaisances, one could attract at one’s home a crowd of friends who have no relation to each other” (ibid., 824). This is certainly a serious point and reminds us of the similar concerns voiced by Pringy. However, it still has to be seen whether this objection is as conclusive as it seems to be on first sight. The second line of criticism concerns the possibility of emotional attachment to a great number of persons: “But do you think [. . .] that the coquette of friendship about whom you speak could truly love those whom she calls her friends?” (ibid., 827). Clarice admits that coquetry of friendship may involve some degree of deceiving others: “One must at least admit [. . .] that she acts as if she would love them all perfectly; for she does whatever she can to attract their confidence [. . .]” (ibid.). Such an attitude, however, seems to be contrary to the demands of friendship:

[A] coquette of friendship never corrects herself; on the contrary, experience makes her more skillful and more occupied, because she encounters every day new contenders, new beautiful spirits, new foreigners [. . .]; and since it is not possible to suffice to fulfil all the duties of friendship toward so many people, one finds at the end that, due to having so many friends, she does no longer have any.

(Ibid., 830–831)

Again, this line of criticism articulates a substantial difficulty for the coquetry of friendship. The dialogue ends quite abruptly, and Clarice takes the defensive stance that, once the years have passed during which coquetry in the usual sense is practicable, she will have to build up serious friendships and to “renounce forever what entertains me presently” (ibid., 840).



Yet, more than 30 years earlier, in the tenth part of *Le Grand Cyrus* (Scudéry 1654), one finds a sustained defense of the idea of coquetry of friendship that offers resources to counter the criticism voiced in *Nouvelles Conversations de Morale*. In *Cyrus*, the figure of Dorinice is described as follows:

[Y]ou must know that this Lady, though never capable of love, nor ever will be as long as she lives, yet is she the greatest fondling in friendship [*Coquette d'amitié*] that is in the world, for she has friends of all sorts, and the wonder is, she gets them every day, and loses none, and does so well keep all such secrets as are instructed to her, that she never injures any, but as far as she is able, is ready to do any service for those whom she hath promised any place in her friendship: Yet [. . .] she hath this particular quality, that she hath set bounds about her heart, beyond the limits of which none whosoever can ever go; for one shall be as high in her favor at three months as they can be in three years.

(Scudéry 1653, 178)

Clearly, particular depth of emotional attachment here is not seen as essential for friendship. This is why having friendships with many persons does not seem to involve any psychological impossibility. What is more, although this kind of friendship is characterized as “tender and gallant friendship” (ibid., 180), it is evident that Scudéry also binds it to moral constraints such as the demands of fidelity that require keeping the secrets of friends confidential and generally the demand not to hurt anyone. This is why the complaisance involved in coquetry of friendship need not to be of a morally objectionable sort, and there is no need to generate confidence through the pretense of feelings that are absent. This is why the attitude articulated here is not self-refuting, contrary to what Scudéry’s later take on the question suggests. On the contrary, it is a strategy that allows Dorinice to attract friends of widely diverging characters:

In fact, some of the friends she had were ambitious men who reported to her the success of their endeavors; some of them were coquets, who told her about their intrigues; some of them were unhappy persons who exaggerated their misfortunes to her; some of them were satirical and told her malicious jokes that one can say with a low voice but doesn’t dare to say loudly; some of them were honorable do-nothings who have a thousand secrets to make although they do not have a single one; some of them were lovers who told her a part of their adventures.

(Scudéry 1654, 603)<sup>10</sup>



Dorinice explains why such an *amitié galante* can work without creating problems with jealousy:

[T]he jealousie which it inspires is not of the same nature as that which Love doth cause, but on the contrary, it is a sweet pleasing and ingenious Spirit, which helps discourse, which augments friendship, which is never melancholic, lumpish or sad, and which produceth no other effects but such as make men more courtly, more neat, and more complaisant.

(Scudéry 1653, 180)

Going one step further, Dorinice not only defends the attractions of coquetry of friendship, she also attacks the illusion standing behind the received view of “serious” friendship. As she argues, restricting friendship to a small number of persons is in danger of becoming joyless. In her view, those who decide to be friends only to a small number of persons “are neither pleasing to themselves nor others: For since they cannot be merry with any but those they love, and since there is but one Phoenix in the world which they can find, certainly they find their diversions very seldom” (ibid.). Contrary to Clarice, Dorinice therefore does not seek this kind of friendship: “Nor do I require that solid friendship which is found in the grave Sages of the world, for they are too cold, too dry, and too tiring melancholick” (ibid.). In her view, persons who believe that friendship should be restricted to a small number of persons cannot offer what is most important for creating and upholding friendship:

They neglect all petty Complements and duties of friendship, and are alwaies so serious, that they cannot endure any mirth: yet truly my opinion is, that for the most part it is the triviall Civilities and Complements which make the most friendship; and for great and high Serves they are so rare, as it is impossible they should both beget and nourish friendship.

(ibid.)

These considerations indicate that the concept of “serious” friendship may carry with it serious shortcomings: The character traits relevant for such kinds of friendship show themselves only in unusual circumstances that occur rarely, while the same character traits do not contribute much to the pleasures of friendship in normal circumstances. By contrast, being content with a somewhat greater emotional distance can bring great benefits because it gives room to the small pleasures and duties that create and invigorate friendships. If so, coquetry of friendship may turn out to be one of the forms of *complaisance honnête* that offer a viable alternative to the morally suspicious forms of self-minded complaisance. At the same time, coquetry of friendship can be understood as a communicative strategy that



secures a sphere of personal autonomy exactly because its very aim is to avoid overly strong obligations in personal relations.

## 5. Conclusion

Maintenon, Pringy, and Scudéry thus represent widely diverging responses to the problems of complaisance and dependence in the *Ancien Régime*. What is common to all three thinkers is a commitment to *honnêteté* that is not restricted to the gallant conception but incorporates elements of a bourgeois, moral conception. However, how the demands of morality relate to complaisance is understood in profoundly different ways. For Maintenon, morality offers an independent source of conscience and self-worth, but the practical relevance of this insight is restricted to guided acting from a dependent position acknowledged by the practices of complaisance. Pringy sees morality and complaisance as antagonistic, but this is the outcome of her exclusive focus on detrimental forms of coquetry that are caused by misguided practices of esteem. Finally, Scudéry combines criticism of immoral forms of complaisance with a conception of “honest complaisance.” Moreover, her conception of coquetry of friendship combines a shrewd insight into both the chances offered by a gallant life and the importance of moral restrictions for building up trust. Coquetry of friendship thus hints at a positive conception of complaisance that is compatible with a sphere of personal autonomy.

## Notes

- 1 For this intuition, see *Esprit* 1677, 1:197–209.
- 2 On coquetry in 18th-century literature, see King and Schlick 2008. The three protagonists of the present article are not dealt with there.
- 3 Pringy’s dates are not recorded by any of the specialized libraries holding the original editions of her works.
- 4 On the relation between fiction and moral reflection in Scudéry, see Grande 1994.
- 5 Maintenon’s *Conversations*, which during her lifetime circulated only in manuscript form, the first publication was in English translation (Maintenon 1758; for the original text, see Maintenon 1828). Maintenon’s persisting interest is also documented by a recent translation of a selection of her texts into modern English (Maintenon 2007). For the sake of unity of style, the French aristocrats covered in this article will all, wherever possible, speak old-fashioned English here.
- 6 Pringy’s text has been published anonymously (Pringy 1694; see Blanchard 1929). The work was translated into English twice, first anonymously (Pringy 1696)—a publication sometimes wrongly attributed to Mary Astell—and then by Sir Thomas Browne, published after Browne’s death and wrongly attributed to him on the title page as author (Pringy 1705). Since the anonymous translation is terminologically closer to the original, I prefer it here over Browne’s more eloquent version.
- 7 The names in the English version of the dialogue differ from the names in the French version.
- 8 As Cousin 1858 has done.



- 9 All translations from this work are my own.  
 10 Since the passage is omitted in Scudéry 1653, the translation is my own.

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# 5 Margaret Cavendish on Women's Autonomy, Political Skepticism, and Republican Values<sup>1</sup>

*Sandrine Bergès*

## Introduction

The 17th century is a foundational period as far as contemporary political thought is concerned, particularly in England, where the political upheavals of the civil war prompted intellectual debates on the nature of political sovereignty and on the legitimacy of various forms of governments. The relationship between liberty, on the one hand, and security and stability on the other was an especially strong concern, as the republican ideals of classical philosophers were enjoying a revival. Philosophers questioned whether citizens could maintain a sufficient degree of independence, or autonomy, while living under a monarch, and whether such autonomy as could be obtained was necessary for the flourishing of the individual or the state. Yet, despite the obvious applications of these debates to what it meant to be a woman in 17th-century society writings of that period from women philosophers are far and few between. If this is because women did not begin to participate in political debates until the 18th century, then it might suggest that the foundations of what we have come to consider as political philosophy were erected by men thinkers only and that women's thought tagged on to something that was already there.<sup>2</sup> In the light of this, any contribution to political philosophy from a woman of that period is significant in that it will help establish what role, if any, women's perspectives played in the development of political philosophy as we know it. Male writers of that period often omit to take into account any aspect of life that pertains to the home and family, focusing merely on the "public" aspect of political life, i.e. government and rebellions. Thus, reflections drawn from a woman's experience on how politics developed in and impacted the so-called private domain would be particularly valuable.

In this chapter, I bring one such writer to the debate. I argue that Margaret Cavendish's political writings are particularly interesting as she attempts to create a path between conservative monarchism on the one hand, and views that are sometimes associated with republicanism on the other. I will be cautious not to identify her views with republicanism, as I do not think it is possible to attribute her views to a particular school of republican



thinking, but instead will highlight the difficulties she herself had identifying with one particular school of political thought.

Cavendish's association with Hobbes (who dined with the family during their Paris exile) may suggest that Cavendish was not only a royalist, but that she also supported absolute monarchy, whatever form it might take. This makes any attempt at reading her political writings through a republican lens seem rather wrong-headed. Yet, it has been done, and done well.<sup>3</sup> What are the motivations for asking whether any part of Cavendish's thought could be described as republican? First, Cavendish lived during a period when many philosophers turned to the thought of Machiavelli, or Cicero, and attempted to revive the old republican ideals in a way that they could be applied to the current situation. Secondly, a century later, women political philosophers embraced republicanism as a way of rejecting not only political tyranny in general, but the gender based tyranny they experienced.<sup>4</sup> A third reason may be that investigating republican tendencies in Cavendish is a way of arguing that she was not simply parroting Hobbes, and that she had original political thoughts of her own. Even if, as I will argue, her republican tendencies are very limited, investigating what they were may help us tease out what was original about her political philosophy.

In what follows, I will investigate some of the issues linked to reading Cavendish as a political philosopher concerned with freedom and autonomy, especially with regards to women's condition, first by suggesting that she may have combined a certain degree of respect for republican views with a deep skepticism as to whether they would be appropriate in any context. In the second section, I look at how some of her republican concerns are developed in her short fiction, and conclude that despite clear sympathies with some republican concepts, there is no evidence that she did embrace republicanism as a viable alternative to monarchy. I suggest that, to some extent, some of her concerns may be interpreted as republican-inspired resistance to Hobbes's conception of autonomy understood as a form of negative liberty.

## 1. Hobbes, Cato, and Political Skepticism

When critics accused her of stealing ideas from philosophers she encountered in her husband's patronage, Margaret Cavendish replied—in print—that she had never exchanged more than a few words with Mr. Hobbes, and none about his philosophy, and that all she had read by him was “a little book called *De Cive*.” (*An Epilogue to My Philosophical Opinions*, in Cavendish 1663). When, a year later, she published her *Philosophical Letters* (Cavendish 1664), she engaged mostly with his natural philosophy, noting in *Philosophical Letters* I.13 that

seeing he treats in his following parts of the politics, I was forced to stay my pen, because of the following reasons. First, that a woman is not employed in state affairs, unless an absolute queen. Next, that to



study politics is but loss of time unless a man were sure to be a favourite to an absolute prince. Thirdly, that it is but a deceiving profession and requires more craft than wisdom.

(Cavendish 1664, 47)

Looking beyond the rhetorical denial of expertise, it is useful to study the actual content of what Cavendish says in *Philosophical Letters* I,13.<sup>5</sup> First, she does not say that women are not, in principle, capable of engaging in politics—but that in practice, they will only be allowed to do so if they are absolute monarchs. Secondly, she makes a claim that is almost as strong with regard to men—they need to be sure that an absolute monarch will always listen to them before they can hope to engage usefully in politics. Third, she casts doubt on the value of all political activity, saying it requires craft, not wisdom. All this seems to put less of an emphasis on women than it does on politics itself, with the addendum that women are even less likely to make a difference for the better than men are.

Cavendish's stated reasons for not engaging with Hobbes on political philosophy is that politics is but a waste of time and that no one, especially not a woman, can hope to make any difference for the better. Although it is clear that women, in particular, would have found the idea that they might participate in politics laughable, to some extent, this applied to men as well. When Elisabeth of Bohemia asked Descartes that he should outline an account of civic duties, Descartes responded that he was not suited to the job:

I lead a life so retired, and I have always been so distant from the management of affairs, that I would not be less impertinent than the philosopher who wanted to instruct on the duty of a captain in the presence of Hannibal if I were to undertake to write here the maxims one ought to observe in civil life. I do not doubt that those your highness proposes are the best of all: that is that it is better to regulate oneself in this regard according to experience rather than according to reason, since we have rarely come across people who are as perfectly rational as all men ought to be, to the extent that one could judge what they will do solely by considering what they ought to do.

(Shapiro 2007, 137)

Interestingly, Elisabeth had a vested interest in the question, as she had been called upon to advise her teenage brother, who was proposing to lead an army against the Turks. But women who were not princesses, and who had no occasion to participate in politics, tended not to write about it.

Descartes makes it quite clear that this inability to comment on political matters is related to a lack of autonomy. He is forced, he says, to put himself "in the power of fortune," which is the furthest one can be from self-rule. In *Sociable Letter* 16, Cavendish similarly ties lack of political influence to the power of self-determination. Women, she says, are neither citizens, nor



subjects of the king, and only barely subjects to their husbands. This means that they have no legal standing, which has the potential to render them “more enslaved than any other creature,” but they are also not accountable and have no duty to perform that will serve the kingdom.

Another way of reading Cavendish’s reluctance to engage with Hobbes’s political philosophy is to see it as a consequence of what David Cunning has called her fallibilism, i.e. her belief that “our cognitive capabilities are highly limited” in so far as uncovering and especially understanding causal relations is concerned (Cunning 2016, 28). If “natural magick [sic]” must, to a large extent, remain a mystery to us, then it would be surprising if we were more clear-sighted as far as human social and political relationships are concerned. But despite her skepticism about our scientific abilities, Cavendish does not seem to think we should give up on pursuing scientific knowledge. The ideal of the “undoubted truth” in natural philosophy, she says, plays a similar role to that of the philosopher’s stone: it cannot be found, but while we search for it, we will discover other useful facts.<sup>6</sup> And just as Cavendish’s skepticism about our scientific abilities does not lead her to conclude that we should give up our scientific pursuits, her political skepticism does not mean that she will not ask philosophical questions about politics. Her skepticism seems to be to political participation, rather than to philosophical enquiry into political questions. In other words, the point of doing political philosophy may not be to provide guidance to rulers or politicians, but it might help us understand human social arrangements better than we currently do.

So whereas we might expect Cavendish to refrain from offering advice to her correspondent where she feels that it will be useless to her, she may well at the same time engage elsewhere on philosophical reflections that are not meant as practical advice. Indeed, her *Orations of Divers Sort* (1662) do just that. In *Sociable Letters* 175 (Cavendish 1997, 240–1), she replies to a friend asking her to set out her thoughts on political philosophy in writing, that although as a woman she knows nothing of the practical matters of war and peace, she has indeed begun to write a series of political orations. But the fact that Cavendish is not presenting herself as a political expert in these orations means that they are not straightforward to interpret.<sup>7</sup>

### 1.1. *Skepticism About Rebellion in the Orations*

The point of a series of orations on various topics expressed from various points of view would be, no doubt, a way of showing off one’s expertise in rhetoric. Yet, Cavendish tells us she has no formal learning that would allow her to develop such expertise, and even if she is not telling the whole truth (she demonstrates a certain familiarity with the rules of rhetoric and possibly had read Hobbes’ translation of Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*), she is hardly setting herself up as a teacher and advertising her prowess at speech making (James 2003, xxiii). She does tell us, however, that she introduced the



different view points in answer to complaints by her readers that she was "unduly forthright" in expressing her opinions (James 2003, xxii).

The section of the *Orations* where one expects to see Cavendish's view on republicanism is the last one, entitled "Orations in a disordered yet unsettled state," and I would like to focus briefly on Oration 153 in that section "To hinder a rebellion" in which a king addresses his people, on the brink of rebelling, and puts to them that they are incapable by nature to live without external rule, that the capacity for autonomous rule which would be required to set up a republic has been bred out of them:

Yet put the case you should have victory, you will sooner make a confusion than settle the kingdom into a republic, for the nature and constitution is not for it, as having been bred up a long time to monarchy, so that you may sooner change the nature of man into a beast than the government of this kingdom into a republic.

(James 2003, 267)

*Orations* 153 suggests that, as we suspected from reading *Philosophical Letters* I,13, Cavendish is a political skeptic, in the sense that she questions whether for any given political action it is likely to achieve the good it aims for, or whether the realities of political life will get in the way of these goods. *Philosophical Letters* I,13 merely states that position, but here we see an argument developing. The reason why it is pointless to attempt to effect sudden political change is because such change would fail to take into account and thus have any effect on long-term habits developed by citizens, and present in their institutions. In other words, for the change to be successful it would have to be social and cultural as well as political. But if a rebellion can upend a political system, it takes rather more to change social and cultural practices and habits.<sup>8</sup>

Secondly, Cavendish seems convinced that a sudden political upheaval will result in chaos and confusion, that newly appointed rulers will not be able to re-establish order, as the sharing of power will result in confusion in *Orations* 67 "A King's Speech to his Rebellious Rout":

[W]hich absolute power cannot be divided amongst many, for if everyone hath liberty to do what he list, not any man will have power to do what he would; for liberty will be lost if everyman will take upon him to rule, and confusion will take place of government. Thus striving for liberty you will thrust yourself into slavery, and out of ambition to rule you will lose all government. [. . .] Wherefore your best way is to submit and obey, to be content to be ruled and not to seek to govern, to enjoy your rights and to revenge your wrongs by law and justice, and not to make war and confusion to destroy yourselves.

(196)



Liberty for all, therefore, is incompatible with each living according to their own will. Cavendish here is suggesting that it is impossible for her contemporaries to become autonomous subjects. They cannot, she claims, both set out their own laws and live by them—if they attempt it they will find themselves enslaved to a greater extent than even before. Here we note also the Hobbesian inspiration: Without absolute power of the state, we may not enjoy any of our liberties, whereas, under a sovereign, at least we have some rights. But there is a different sort of emphasis being placed, an emphasis on sudden change from an established monarchy to a republican government, through rebellion. The reason why a revolt against a king will not result in a stable government that protects our rights and freedom is that the new order will not have the opportunity to organize itself into a successful government, to share the power between its members in an effective manner. In this sense the argument resembles that of *Orations* 153: We cannot hope to establish anything stable suddenly, and, without stability, a nation will return to a Hobbesian state of nature in which no-one enjoys any liberty. Thus, Cavendish's political skepticism takes on a more tangible form. What she seems to be worried about is the wisdom of sudden, revolutionary political change. She does not believe that a revolt against the existing order is likely to lead to the conditions necessary for the foundations of a new order. Because starting a republican government will require more organization and co-operation between large numbers of people than an absolute monarchy would, it follows that she is mostly skeptical about the project of creating a republican government through rebellion.

### 1.2. *Reading Cato's Life*

Research in the history of reading suggests that early modern readers of the classics tended to read works on political theory and history “for action,” that is, theirs was “a close and informed reading, with a diplomatic or political end in mind” (Jardine and Grafton 1990, 44). They looked in the texts for a model of how a virtuous subject or citizen should act, and sought to imitate the actions depicted in those texts, to study strategy, or government. Aristotle's and Cicero's *Constitutions* were thought of as models, Livy's *History* as a textbook for when to obey and when to rebel, Plutarch's *Lives* as a model and inspiration for virtue. This of course applied to male readers. A female reader would not have been perusing Plutarch looking for military tips. And indeed, women were not supposed to read Plutarch, or at least not those books of his that dealt with military virtues. Women's readings were supposed to bring them closer to home, showing them portraits of virtuous women of antiquity, and holding them up as an example. So, in this sense, male and female reading practices were the same: Both had to seek exemplars and adjust their lives accordingly, but given the passivity of females exemplars, a woman's reading can hardly be described as being “for action.” Citing Thomas Salter, the author of a mirror for women, Dodds



outlines what a 17th-century woman's reading should be about: seeking to become more like the virtuous roman women depicted in Plutarch's *Morals*, turning their attention to developing their wifely and home-making virtues (Dodds 2011, 48). Because she is reading Cato's life for political insight, Cavendish is unusual. At the same time, because she is a "deviant" reader, we should not expect her interpretation to offer a straightforward message. Her praise of Cato's character, even if sincere, is not unambiguous, and certainly does not apply to his political choices, i.e. support the Republic to the point that he will commit suicide rather than see it perish.

The specific worry about republican revolts explains her objection to Cato's resistance, in *Sociable Letters*, Letter 187, where she discusses her reading of Plutarch's *Lives*.<sup>9</sup> Reading the story of Cato, she tells us: "makes me love the memory of Cato, for his courage, honesty and wisdom, and for the love of his country." But, she goes on, he was wrong in thinking that he died for his country when Rome went from being a republic to a monarchy, because:

[A]lthough he knew the old government was so corrupted as it caused riots, tumults, seditions, factions and slaughters, killing and murdering even in the market place, so as it could not be worse what chance soever came, but was probable a change of government might make it more peaceable and safe; wherefore Cato did not kill himself for the peace and unity of his country, but rather for the government.

(Cavendish 1997, 198)<sup>10</sup>

What then can this letter tell us about Cavendish's attitude to political change? It does not suggest, for one thing, that monarchy is obviously better than a republic. What Cavendish says is that the republic Cato knew was very bad, corrupted, and that nothing new was likely to be worse. This could be seen as a way of saying that all republics are doomed to corruption, but there is no evidence in the text that this is what she meant. It could also be read more simply as the claim that a new system is always better than one that has become corrupt, and that one should look at the potential stability of that new system, rather than its ideological underlying. And given that it is easier to establish an absolute monarchy than a republic in a state of emergency, then a monarchy replacing a republic is likelier to be successful than a republic replacing a monarchy. Therefore there is no contradiction between my readings of *Oration 67* and *Sociable Letter 187*. Sensible people who truly love their countries, Cavendish tells us, will discount ideological preferences for more practical solutions—and this means avoiding rebellions, but if they are unavoidable because the old system is too corrupt, then preferring a new government that will not require a lot of co-ordination for its establishment, i.e. a government where one person is in charge.

Taking the letter on Cato together with the *Orations* and *Philosophical Letters* I,13 leads to the following interpretation. Cavendish is not just



skeptical that political ideology can make a positive difference to political practice and the fate of a nation, but also that change—unless the position of origin is the worst it could possibly be, as in Cato’s Rome—is generally dangerous and to be avoided. Cavendish, it seems, does not believe human beings capable of getting themselves sufficiently organized to form a sound government on the back of a rebellion. This leads her to fear political change, or at least sudden change. One problem with this interpretation is that it clashes with another reading of the Cato letter, one in which Cavendish blames Cato for his fear of change. As Dodds says: “For Cavendish, Cato’s celebrated constancy becomes a naive fear of change that blinds him to the true conditions of his circumstances” (Dodds 2011, 206). However, it seems to me that Cavendish is criticizing Cato for caring so much for the type of government that he is blind to what is happening to his country. If he cared for the people and not the ideology, he would gladly let the change happen. Instead, he is blindly holding on to a principle of choosing the practical change that would rescue his nation from disaster.

I conclude this section with the claim that there is a good presumption that Cavendish was a monarchist by default, that her support of the king was more due to her belief that change is hard and that her contemporaries were not fit for it, than to a philosophical rejection of republican principles. This ties in to the skepticism we observed in the first part of this section: Republicanism requires not just thinking, but acting, and Cavendish does not believe that she or anyone else is capable of acting in the ways that are required—whether because their character is not trained to do so, or because they would need support from more people than are willing and able to help. In that sense, Cavendish can agree with Hobbes on the necessity of absolute power, but on contingent, rather than necessary grounds, for practical, rather than philosophical reasons, and thus leaving room for accepting certain republican values and principles. I will investigate the extent to which she does that in the next section.

## 2. Women, Slaves, and Republican Freedom

Despite her unflinching backing of the monarchy and her strong warnings against rebellion, it is clear that Cavendish regards freedom and autonomy (in the republican sense, where autonomy is understood as independence) as things to be valued and sometimes defended. Lisa Walters argues that her position on freedom situates Cavendish as part of the republican ideas that were at the center of the civil war. According to her, Cavendish “articulates republican beliefs about tyrannicide, self-defence, natural rights and popular sovereignty” (Walters 2014, 195). Walters does not claim that Cavendish embraced the republican theories of her time, and does not suggest that she would have read Harrington, or indeed any sustained republican argumentation. But, she says, Cavendish could not have failed to pick up on the views that played such a central role in the civil war. To this we might



add that, of course, she was familiar with Roman republican views, as she clearly knew her Plutarch. But we should be careful about attributing her any particular set of republican beliefs: even if she saw merit in some of their views, this did not amount to a systematic defense, or even acceptance of any republican view, whether Roman, Cromwellian, or of the kind we now call neo-republican.<sup>11</sup> The beliefs she articulates are isolated, and to be taken together with her more conservative views, rather than part of a system.

### 2.1. *Self-Defense and Liberty in Assaulted and Pursued Chastity*

Walters and Karen Detlefsen have shown that Cavendish's apparently republican views are mostly to be found in her fiction and drama—but elements can also be seen in her non-fiction work, in particular the *Sociable Letters* (Walters 2014 and Detlefsen 2012). In this section, I will focus on a short story published in 1656, *Assaulted and Pursued Chastity*, the tale of a rich and virtuous young lady, returning from exile to her family after a civil war, who is shipwrecked and captured for the sake of prostitution.

A prince comes to the brothel where she is held in order to be the first to rape her, and Miseria (as she calls herself then) threatens him with a pistol, claiming that

[I]t is no sin to defend myself against an obstinate and cruel enemy, and know said she, I am no ways to be found, by wicked persons but in death; for whilst I live, I live in honour, or when I kill or be killed, I will die for security.

In that passage, the heroine is emphasizing that she sees the prince, not as a figure of authority whom she ought to obey, but as a threat she ought to defend herself against. There is a degree of ambivalence as to whether this is a radical move, as the prince, although he is the ruler of the land she is in, is not her ruler as she is captive and not a subject of his kingdom and therefore does not owe him obedience. Walter interprets the passage as part of

a unique political theory of self-defense, one which does not merely articulate an individual woman's right to self-preservation, but also engages with republican polemics that perceived self-defense as a key political concept for protecting commonwealth from tyranny or arbitrary power.

(Walters 2014, 195)

In the light of my reservations above, it is not clear whether we should accept Walter's interpretation. First, the idea that one has the right to defend oneself even against a king is not necessarily, by itself, a republican one. Hobbes believed the same.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps more importantly, Hobbes did not



believe that a slave could be bound by a contract, and therefore, had no duty of obedience, whether or not their lives were threatened. As I suggested, Miseria is a captive, and enslaved at the point the Prince comes to rape her, and not a subject. Thus this does not constitute by itself evidence of republican thought. There is, however, some evidence that Cavendish intends her heroine's rebellion to go much further. After she threatens him with a gun, the prince decides to take Miseria home to his palace to live, in the hope that she will become his mistress. She attempts suicide and then escapes, dressed as a man, and sets sails again. This time, she is shipwrecked on an island where cannibalism is practiced and slavery endemic: the government, which she describes as Tyrannical, and all the common people are enslaved to the royal family. The slaves, who are to be eaten, are kept like cattle, bred and fattened, and killed in such a way as not to decimate the race. Travellia (as she is now called), revolted by this practice, decides to learn the language of the island and pretend to be a god. She uses her influence to liberate the slaves:

And to you beloved people, the Gods commands Piety in your devotion; Obedience to our King; Love to your neighbour; Mercy to your Enemies; Constancy to your friends; Liberty to your Slaves; Care and industry for your Children; Duty to your parents.

One relevant difference between Travellia's freeing of the slaves and Miseria's attempted tyrannicide is that when she is Travellia, she is no longer a slave herself, and her motivations cannot be self-defense. But is she freeing the slaves because she believes slavery is wrong, or because she finds that this particular type of enslavement, of an entire people for the purpose of eating them, is distasteful? In the *Sociable Letters*, 65, Cavendish does in fact advocate that common people should be "kept like cattle" not for the purpose of being eaten, but to prevent them getting ideas above their station which might lead to rebellion.

Wherefore the Commons should be kept like Cattle in Inclosed Grounds, and whensoever any did Break out of their Bounds, they should be Impounded, that is, the Commons should be kept strictly, not to Exceed their Rank or Degree in Shew and Bravery, but to live according to their Qualities, nor according to their Wealth.

(Cavendish 1997, 78)

It is unlikely, thus, that the act of Travellia in *Assaulted Chastity*—assuming that in both pieces Cavendish is speaking with something like her own voice—is motivated by a republican distaste for slavery.

Another problem with reading *Assaulted and Pursued Chastity* as evidence that Cavendish, despite her royalist affiliations and sometimes absolutist tendencies, also held some republican views is that most of what she



says in that story is contradicted elsewhere. In a later story, *The Blazing World*, she does not favor the idea that one should defend one's liberty against arbitrary power. The empress of the *Blazing World*, when faced with dissent and factions amongst her people, is advised by her friend, the disembodied soul of the Duchess of Newcastle, to resume a more absolutist rule:

She would advise her Majesty to introduce the same form of Government again, which had been before; that is, to have but one sovereign, one Religion, one Law, and one Language, so that all the World might be but as one united Family, without divisions.

(Cavendish 1668, 87)

## 2.2. *Hobbesian Absolutism and Powers in the Blazing World and the Plays*

*Blazing World*, much like *Assaulted and Pursued Chastity*, tells the story of a woman who is captured and threatened with rape but frees herself and goes on adventures, discovering new worlds. But whereas in *Assaulted and Pursued Chastity* the heroine is only all powerful for a moment, when she poses as a god, in *Blazing World* the heroine becomes empress of the world she discovers and later of her old world too. She is therefore the most powerful person in the universe, and she is not in any way subject to arbitrary power, so perhaps she has no reason to resist it. In *Assaulted and Pursued Chastity*, the heroine finds herself prisoner on several occasions, so subject to the power of those who would not only restrain her liberty, but also rape her and possibly eat her. She has all the reasons in the world to resist. Perhaps this perspectival view of the call to resist explains why Cavendish also believes that rulers should not tolerate resistance of any kind,<sup>13</sup> and why she even goes so far as to compare the people in a monarchy to cattle, arguing that letting them attempt to cross social lines would constitute a threat to security (Cavendish 1664, 78). So whatever republican leanings she may have had and are displayed in some of her works, she seems nonetheless committed to a Hobbesian view of the necessity, or at least desirability of protecting the commonwealth through an absolute regime.

But even so, the story does not end with Cavendish simply adopting a Hobbesian justification for absolute monarchy. Karen Detlefsen has pointed out that there are in fact significant differences between Hobbes and Cavendish on the question of liberty, which differences entail that it would be much harder for Cavendish than for Hobbes to advocate absolute monarchy (Detlefsen 2012, 158). In particular, Detlefsen argues that Cavendish disagrees with Hobbes because she is able to think about liberty from a woman's perspective.<sup>14</sup> For Hobbes, having the liberty or not to act in a certain way depends on having the power to do so, so that my not being able to fly (because I have no wings) does not make me unfree in any way, it does not affect my autonomy. Autonomy, for a non-flying creature, does not



involve the ability to decide whether or not to fly, and, for a person without the capacity to form moral or political judgments, it does not imply the capacity to make important life decisions. Autonomy here, is simply to be free from impediments to self-directed motion. If we decide, all things considered, that we want to move and nothing external stops us, then that counts as autonomy in the Hobbesian sense. We cannot decide, all things considered, to fly like a bird if we know we have no wings. Being autonomous in the Hobbesian sense requires awareness and acceptance of one's natural limitations or powers. This is where Cavendish departs from Hobbes. Cavendish understands that for women, to lack a certain power translates into a lack of freedom if the reason they lack that power is an internalized custom.

It is in her plays that Cavendish most clearly articulates the degree to which women have less power and thus less freedom than men, and that this difference is caused by unnatural, wholly conventional reasons. In one, *The Convent of Pleasure* the heroine refuses to marry because "Men [. . .] make the Female sex their slaves" (Cavendish 1668, 30). In another play, *Youth's Glory*, a young woman dresses as a man to seek experience and an education. She does so with her father's blessing because he understands that her rationality is impeded by her female upbringing and that she will lead a better life if she can get an education.

Detlefsen (2012, 157–58) notes that for Cavendish one does lack freedom when one lacks power, and in her plays she clearly articulates the degree to which women have less power and thus less freedom than do men for unnatural, wholly conventional reasons, due to their diminished rationality, due to their poor education. In other words, Cavendish asks the reader to look out for internal as well as external obstacles to motion.<sup>15</sup>

One very clear example is that of Cavendish herself, who because she lacked the power to read Latin could not converse on an equal basis with the male philosophers and scientists she sought to engage in debate. She could not read what they had read, nor, for the most part, what they wrote. Her freedom to participate in the debates of her time was seriously impeded by this lack. Again, for instance, a woman who does not have the power to think critically and engage in argument with men will not be in a position to manage her family's property and defend her financial interests when she is widowed—as Cavendish's mother did for a long time. But such powers can only be acquired through education, and, as Cavendish writes in her *Sociable Letters*, women typically do not receive the sort of education that would be useful for defending their interests (let alone participate in philosophical and scientific debates!) (Skinner 1990, 136).

Cavendish's reluctance to accept that a lack of power rules out the question of liberty also translates into a disagreement with Hobbes about domination. As far as Hobbes is concerned, a citizen who acts out of fear is still free because "when such a person acts, it will still be because he possesses the will or desire to act in precisely the way in which he acts" (Hobbes 1985, 262).



Feare and Liberty are consistent; as when a man throweth his goods into the sea for *feare* the ship should sink, he doeth it neverthelesse very willingly, and may refuse to doe it if he will: It is therefore the action of one that was *free*.

(Hobbes 1985, 262)<sup>16</sup>

One need only turn to news stories of refugees coming from Syria in overcrowded boats to understand how callous this account of freedom is. There is no freedom to be had in moving from one loss to another, especially when one is making the decision under the pressure of fear. In some cases, the pretense that we are free may be yet another tool to oppress us, as for example in the case of the woman forced to choose which one of her two children will die in the novel *Sophie's Choice*. But, more generally, the citizen who acts out of fear that a ruler may intervene in her life in an unpleasant way and therefore chooses to act in such a way as to avoid such intervention is dominated: Her choices are determined by her fear of what may, very possibly, be done to her, given the political setting she lives in.

By emphasizing the role of education in the development of one's natural powers, Cavendish shows that Hobbes's view that fear does not affect liberty leaves no room for the idea that powers, though they may be natural, need to be developed, and that the use of fear as control prevents powers from developing. A person who is dominated will not grow to the full of their potential. This is very clear from the writings of Mary Wollstonecraft, for instance, who argues that women, although they are in principle equal to men in all respects, are not in fact, for the most part, capable of using their reason or their bodies in a way that a man would, as the growth of their faculties has been stunted by their education (or lack thereof) and by habits formed through customs.<sup>17</sup>

What Cavendish brings to the discussion on liberty, therefore, is not a demand that there should be more, but a cautioning that what Hobbes understands as lack of powers, and therefore not an obstacle to exercising one's liberty may in fact be the repression of power, or at least, its atrophying through lack of appropriate development.

Cavendish, then, it would appear, has a subtler analysis of freedom based on powers. Because she thinks that we need to pay attention to internal obstacles to action, and not simply "external impediments," her conception of autonomy is quite different from Hobbes and informed by some aspects of republicanism, i.e. liberty as non-domination. She understands that powers are shaped by laws and customs, and that under certain circumstances, they can either fail to develop or develop in such a way as to minimize the liberties they entail. Fear is one way to prevent the growth of powers, and indeed this is very much a trope in the philosophy of the 18th century, in particular in philosophers who argued for the need for individuals to develop their autonomy, such as Kant and Wollstonecraft. Both argued that those that most needed to rebel and fight for their autonomy suffered from a fear of their



own potential (the powers they might and should develop) internalized from their social and political environment. A woman who has been brought up to see herself as a fragile and dependent being (Wollstonecraft 1993, 112) or a peasant who has been led in everything like a beast of burden (Kant 1983, 41) will not want to fight for liberty, for they will be afraid to fail. Thus, Detlefsen tells us “fear and liberty are inconsistent for Cavendish. As a result, the realm of unfreedom is considerably wider for Cavendish than it is for Hobbes” (Detlefsen 2012, 159).

Cavendish recognizes that being afraid is not simply a reason to choose not to act, but perhaps more importantly, a cause of not developing one’s innate powers. This has the following implication. Cavendish does seem to accept that monarchy is the best constitution in 17th-century England, in that it affords the best protection against our inability to muster the sort of co-operation that setting up and maintaining a republic would require. But Cavendish also recognizes that there is more to autonomy than the absence of impediments to the exercise of one’s existing powers. She understands that the downside of absolute monarchy is that it may prevent the development of powers in certain members of society and that these will be disadvantaged and perhaps more the victims of the system than its beneficiaries.

## Notes

- 1 I am grateful to Lars Vinx and Bill Wringe for their careful comments on an earlier draft, and to Eric Schliesser and the audience of the Duke New Narratives conference in April 2016 for their comments and to Alberto Siani for his careful reading and suggestions.
- 2 There were other women in the 17th century who wrote political philosophy, such as Marie le Jars de Gournay, Gabrielle Suchon, and Mary Astell, as well as women petitioners during the Civil War. See Broad and Green 2009. But all of them, like Cavendish (and perhaps to a greater extent, even), are still considered somewhat marginal to the development of modern political philosophy.
- 3 See especially Walters 2014.
- 4 See, for instance, Mary Wollstonecraft, Catharine Macaulay, Sophie de Grouchy, and Marie-Jeanne Phlipon Roland.
- 5 This apology is not an isolated occurrence, and at least twice in the *Sociable Letters*, published that same year, she concludes by stating that as a woman she ought not to voice an opinion about politics (*Sociable Letters* 65 and 67). Of course in the *Sociable Letters* these denials come after she has done just that, i.e. expressed her philosophical opinion on a political matter, just as in *Sociable Letters* 127, she follows two pages of sustained literary criticism by concluding that women are not fit to judge on these matters. This denial of expertise is a common enough trope amongst women writers at times or places when their opinion on substantial matters was unlikely to be welcome or taken seriously. No doubt, there is also an element of self-distrust and dissatisfaction with her own lack of formal education, which prevents her from reading classic texts except in (often, summarized) translations. In the “Preface to the Reader” of the *World’s Olio* (1655), she argues at length that whatever is wrong with her book must be put down to the fact that she is a woman, and therefore has less powerful (“softer” and “colder”) brains than men.



- 6 See *Philosophical Letters* 507–509, and Cuning, 31.
- 7 Broad and Green warn us that: “On political subjects, Cavendish often makes “Declamations” in which she considers the pros and cons of a position, but she rarely takes a positive stand of her own. It is thus extremely difficult to differentiate between Cavendish’s genuinely held views and those that she defends simply for the sake of rhetorical effect” (Broad and Green, 2009, 202).
- 8 Note that this view is not Hobbesian, as Hobbes would not grant traditions any weight in his attempt to rationally justify absolutism (I owe this point to Lars Vinx, minus the split infinitive.)
- 9 She would have read *The Lives* in Thomas North’s translation from the French, like Shakespeare cf (Dodds, 2011, 203).
- 10 Dodds 2011, 205, suggests that Cavendish’s admiration for Cato is also generic, what one is expected to say upon reading Plutarch’s *Lives*. But although she is unrestrained in her criticism of his suicide—“even the wisest men may err”—she also notes that his act was more admirable than that of those who killed Caesar, for it was only the result of a mistake, and not a sign of envy. She concludes the letter by reminding us of his honesty.
- 11 It is also important to note that republican beliefs need not be in opposition to monarchy as such: if a monarchy were to be set up so that any arbitrariness was checked and compensated by public deliberation, then it could be termed republican, at least according to some writers—for instance, Montesquieu.
- 12 “If the Sovereign command a man (though justly condemned,) to kill, wound, or mayme himselfe; or not to resist those that assault him; or to abstain from the use of food, ayre, medicine, or any other thing, without which he cannot live; yet hath that man the Liberty to disobey” (Hobbes 1985, 21).
- 13 “Though a king may err in his government, yet a people errs more in their rebellion, for the greatest tyrant that ever was never so destroying or cruel as a rebellion or civil war, for this makes a dissolution, whereas the other makes but some interruptions” (*Orations*, James 2003, 78).
- 14 This is not to say that Hobbes would disagree about the specific points Cavendish makes about women’s powers and liberties, but that perhaps he had not taken them under consideration which resulted in him adopting a particular theory that Cavendish wants to modify.
- 15 “[Women should be] instructed and taught more industriously, carefully, and prudently, to temper their passions and govern their appetites, [. . .] for their education is only to dance, sing and fiddle, to write complemental letters and to read romances, to speak some language that is not their native, which education is an education of the body and not of the mind, and shows that their parents take more care of their feet than their head” (Cavendish 1997, 36–37).
- 16 Hobbes draws the example from the *Nichomachean Ethics* 1110a.
- 17 For a defense of this argument, see (Bergès 2009, 82–85).

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# 6 Three Types of Infinite Autonomy

## The Philosophy of Anne Conway

*Fiona Tomkinson*

### 1. Introduction: Feminism and Autonomy

Feminist philosophers have frequently critiqued the concept of autonomy, especially in its Kantian and Rawlsian manifestations, as being derived from an atomistic sense of the self, seen in isolation from the network of social relations, or even as proceeding from a selfish and solipsistic sense of individuality. It has been seen as devaluing the life-experience of many women, particularly those who devote themselves to traditional family or caring roles. In particular, promotion of the ideal of self-sufficiency or substantive independence has been seen as inimical to women, since it is more difficult for them to attain, and they will be devalued for failing to attain it (Young 1990; Code 1991); it has also been argued that being a woman tends to mean being primarily involved in social relationships of care, which are devalued by the concept of autonomy (Stoljar 2000).

I would take issue with a number of aspects of these arguments. First, the critique of Kantianism does not appear to take full account of the fact that Kantian autonomy involves subordination to the moral law; for Kant, a choice based on desire rather than the moral law would be heteronomous. (My own use of the term autonomy in what follows, however, includes both Kantian autonomy and heteronomy.) Second, I would question the implications that traditional women's occupations are intrinsically more "caring," especially if the emotional aspect of caring and the question of the degree of genuine altruism with which it is assumed—aspects which are exceptionally difficult to quantify—are excluded from consideration. It might be argued that the male doctor is as much involved in the duty of care as the female nurse, the male street-sweeper just as much as the female cleaner, and the schoolmaster as much as the female nursery school teacher. It might even be claimed that the husband—or "career woman"—who works long hours to pay for the family food is just as involved in the process of caring for the family as the wife—or "house-husband"—who cooks the food and washes the dishes. The consideration that women are often underpaid and underappreciated for their work and are all-too-often confined to subordinate roles within the workplace or household is a different issue. Care seen as



Heideggerian *Sorge* might indeed be seen as permeating all human activities. Even if caring is defined in terms of providing benefit to others, even the person who provides only for him or herself may be said to benefit the community by not being a burden upon it, and perhaps also through paying taxes, and officially “unemployed” persons may make innumerable intangible contributions to society besides the classic examples of homemaker or “carer” for a young, sick, disabled, or elderly person. If collaboration with others is seen as the key factor, it cannot be denied that pursuits traditionally dominated by males (politics, commerce, hunting for food, the military) often require a high degree of collaboration and, however wicked and selfish some of the individuals who undertake them, and however futile or pernicious the undertakings may turn out to be, are theoretically taken on with the aim of protecting and providing for others.

However, my major concern here is with whether the concept of the autonomous individual, the individual who exercises freedom to self-determination and self-fashioning, can be reconciled with the concept of an individual clearly acknowledged to be in relationships of interdependence, and whose freedom is clearly acknowledged to be in some ways limited. My claim will be that the philosophy of Anne Conway provides such a model on the level of ontology, thus giving us hints of how a similar model might function in politics.

Considering Conway’s philosophy from the perspective of autonomy, one is presented with a system in which various kinds of autonomy flourish in a relationship of interdependence. This singular-plural concept of autonomy is presented in the context of a vitalist and dynamic world-view, in which all creatures are linked to one another, and in which all creatures are linked to the divine.

## 2. Autonomy and Dualism in the 17th-Century Context

In the 17th century, the question of autonomy often arose in the context of debates on the freedom of the will and of pneumatological treatises on the question of the independence of the soul, dealing with the nature of the soul’s relationship with the body, external influences, and the Creator. Usually, the soul’s independence was defended, often in the context of proving its immortality, through the defense of a dualistic philosophy. However, as John Sutton has pointed out, there were many dualisms besides the pure Cartesian one, and the differences between spirit and matter were formulated differently by English authors such as Sir Kenelm Digby, Walter Charleton, and, of course, Conway’s friend and mentor, Henry More, author of the 1659 treatise *The Immortality of the Soul So farre as it is demonstrable from the Knowledge and the Light of Reason*. In Sutton’s words:

What mattered to these experimental mechanical philosophers was thus not always the particular conception of body with which souls were to



be related, but that limits should be firmly set to those powers, whatever they might be. Dualism did not have to take any one particular form.

(Sutton 2013, 15)

Conway is, however, unusual in that she defends the autonomy of the soul/spirit from within a system which recognizes three basic substances and which is monist in the sense that body and soul are seen as existing in a continuum.

### 3. Conway's Text

Our knowledge of Conway's thought is almost entirely based on her posthumously published treatise, *Principia philosophiae antiquissimae et recentissimae*, which was translated into Latin from her notebooks (she left behind a very difficult-to-decipher pencil-written manuscript which is now lost). This treatise was first published in Amsterdam in 1690 in the volume *Opuscula philosophica* before being retranslated into English in 1692 as *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy Concerning God, Christ, and the Creature; that is, concerning Spirit and Matter in General. Translated by "J.C."* (Conway 1692; see Hutton 1). There have been modern retranslations from the Latin by Coudert and Taylor Corse, and most recently by Jonathan Bennett—I shall use Bennett's translation, although it does not attempt to compete with the others in terms of the elegance of its prose, since it gives Conway a more modern flavor and emphasizes her connection with analytic philosophy.

In this work, Conway challenges both the materialistic monisms of Hobbes and Spinoza and the dualistic philosophies of Descartes and of her mentor and friend, Henry More. She presents an ontology consisting of three existing substances: the First Substance, God (who is both distinct from and "intimately present" or imminent within his creation), the Second Substance, Christ or Adam Kadmon, referred to in the Kabbalistic writings, and the Third Substance, consisting of creatures. Body and spirit are on a continuum; pure spirit exists, but pure matter does not: Matter is always to some degree infused with spirit. The First Substance is purely spiritual, and the other substances combine body and spirit in complex ways: the Second Substance functions as a "vehicle" for the First in the same way that the body does for the soul (Conway 2009, 10); as in traditional Christian belief, it is seen as taking on flesh at the time of Christ's Incarnation, but Conway also claims that it possesses a type of body before that. Creatures are composed of a mixture of spirit monads and body monads, and they are in flux, with their composition and proportion of spirit monads relative to body-monads changing over time.

### 4. Infinite Autonomies

Each of these three substances is *autonomous in a different way* and possesses a *different type of infinity*. God *qua* First Substance is alone autonomous



in the sense of independence and aseity, and these aspects of Himself are incommunicable to his creatures, yet, crucially, there is an autonomy which He lacks: the freedom to change Himself for better or worse. The Second Substance, Christ or Adam Kadmon, can infinitely change Himself for the better, but not for the worse, whilst the Third Substance, the creatures, though lacking independence, actually possess a freedom which God himself does not: the freedom of will to change themselves for the better or the worse. In Kantian terms, they can be both autonomous and heteronomous. When moving in the direction of goodness, they have an infinite potential which, nevertheless, cannot ever attain the infinite actuality of God; when moving in the direction of evil, they will hit rock bottom and turn themselves around, since in Conway's eschatology, the punishments of Hell are not eternal and have a curative and redemptive purpose. This also introduces a kind of determinism into her system: creatures are all eventually predestined to salvation, whether they like it or not! They can, however, choose the path by which they arrive.

### *The First Type of Infinite Autonomy*

Conway's treatise begins with an orthodox statement of God's perfections and an emphasis on the concept of infinity:

God is spirit, light and life, he is infinitely wise, good, just and strong, he knows everything, is present everywhere, can do anything, he is the creator and maker of all things visible and invisible.

(Conway 2009, 1)

However, from the statement that God "can do anything" (Conway 2009, 1), we pass fairly swiftly to some of the things which God *can't do*:

his creatures are not parts of him; and they can't change into him, any more than he can change into them. [. . .] God can't ever have new knowledge or make a new decision: his knowledge and his will [. . .] are eternal—outside time or beyond time.

(Conway 2009, 1)

Indeed, he is "wholly unchangeable" (Conway 2009, 12) and therefore incapable of change. Although Conway phrases these limitations in terms of God's perfection rather than His limitations, they could be said to constitute a limit on the divine autonomy: God cannot choose to impose upon Himself such a law that He will in future continually acquire new knowledge, come to new decisions, or alter himself in any way.

It might be claimed that Conway places these limitations on the divine freedom to act because God's freedom to do things contrary to His nature would involve a contradiction in terms, and she does indeed invoke this



argument when she asserts that “God can do anything that doesn’t imply a contradiction” (Conway 2009, 5). Yet a contradiction in terms could also be said to arise from the fact that there are certain things which an omnipotent being cannot do. Conway’s motivation does not seem to be primarily to avoid contradictions, but, following Origen and the Cambridge Platonists, to align herself with intellectualist rather than voluntarist views of the divine nature, choosing to emphasize God’s goodness and rationality at the expense of his absolute freedom to act. She does not merely assert that God is incapable of doing evil, she carries things much further in the second section of the treatise, where she discusses Creation and the relationship between eternity and time. Here she advances the non-Biblical argument that God has been engaged in the work of Creation for all eternity and clearly implies that God could not have chosen *not* to create and cannot choose to stop creating, nor could He even have chosen to create a finite as opposed to infinite number of creatures—there are an infinite number of creatures and each creature “has infinity in it” (Conway 2009, 6). All this is necessitated by God’s nature:

The infinity of time from the beginning of creation can likewise be proved by the goodness of God. For God is infinitely good, loving, and generous; indeed, he is goodness and charity—the infinite fountain and ocean of goodness, charity and generosity. How could that fountain not flow [. . .] perpetually? [. . .] God’s goodness communicates itself and makes itself grow; that is its nature. [. . .] And since he can’t augment himself, because that would be the creating of many Gods, which is a contradiction, it necessarily follows that he brought creatures into existence from time everlasting, i.e. through a numberless sequence of time periods. Otherwise the goodness communicated by God, which is his essential attribute would be indeed finite and could be numbered in terms of years. Nothing is more absurd. [. . .] God’s essential attribute is to be a Creator [. . .] therefore he will always be one, because otherwise he would change; and there always have been creatures and always will be.

(Conway 2009, 4)

Somewhat ironically, given Conway’s loathing of Hobbesian philosophy, the image of the fountain used here suggests that of the river used in the famous definition of liberty in *Leviathan*—a river moving in its natural direction without encountering any obstacle, the necessity of its flowing in a particular direction when unimpeded not constituting any reduction in its liberty: in the same way, God will never meet any impediments to His will, but His will does not control its own nature. However, this metaphor is combined here with a view advanced by Hobbes’s opponent in the free-will debate, Bramhall: the belief that rational election as a necessity for true liberty. God cannot help being *rational* any more than the river can choose



not to flow. Conway denies that her argument entails any denial of God's freedom of will—she rather claims in exceedingly emphatic language that it is rather the scholastic concept of “indifference of will,” or the power to act arbitrarily, which she is denying. God has already, as it were, decided how to act with regard to every issue and occasion:

If we consider the divine attributes that I have mentioned, especially God's wisdom and his goodness, then we can utterly refute—we can destroy—the indifference of the will that has been attributed to God (and wrongly called “free will”) by the Scholastics and other so-called philosophers. God's will is indeed utterly free: just because he is free and acts spontaneously in whatever he does.

(Conway 2009, 5)

Yet we can nevertheless assert that there are, in a sense, some freedoms which God does not have: He does not have the freedom to divest himself of his wisdom and rationality, nor does He have the freedom to act contrary to them. It is not the case that He could not do these things if He willed them, but that He cannot will to do them, as it is contrary to his nature.

### *The Second Type of Infinite Autonomy*

Conway's Second Substance necessarily has to come into existence as a result of two facts: the first being God's desire to create living beings with whom He can communicate, and the second being the inability of such creatures to endure the intensity of His light. The Second Substance thus comes into Being through the creation of a kind of hollow in the omnipresence of God where this intensity is reduced:

This empty space was not merely a negative item, a non-thing like a gap in someone's engagement-book. Rather, it was an actual place where the light was not so bright. It was the soul of the Messiah, known to the Hebrews as Adam Kadmon.

(Conway 2009, 2)

Conway combines the orthodox Christian concept of the Second Person of the Trinity as being begotten and not created by the Father with a more controversial belief in the omnipresence of the Second Substance:

He is produced by generation or emanation from God rather than by the process of creation; He possesses all the characteristics which can be said without contradiction to be passed on from God, and this means that He is present everywhere in all creation and all creatures and is



used as a medium through which God works with creatures. He shares eternity which belongs to God, and time which belongs to creatures.  
(Conway 2009, 13)

He is not, however, subject to death and decay, and neither is anything which is perfectly united to Him: “Here is perpetual youth, without old age, but with the virtues of age, namely great increase of wisdom and experience without any of the imperfections that old age normally brings” (Conway 2009, 14). When this Second Substance became flesh in the Incarnation of Christ, “he took on some of our nature and thus of the nature of everything. [. . .] In taking on flesh and blood, Christ sanctified nature so that he could sanctify everything, analogous to fermenting a whole mass of stuff by fermenting one part of it.” (Conway 2009, 14) His nature is thus infinite, but it lacks the absolute independence of the first substance and also its quality of unchangeability. This means that the nature of the Second Substance includes the freedom to develop and change. However, this changeability needs to be further defined: it is only the quality of changing infinitely from one good towards another, including changing from good to better (Conway 2009, 12).

### *The Third Type of Infinite Autonomy*

Finally, we have the Third Substance, the creatures. It is of vital importance that the totality of creatures forms a “single species though it includes many individuals gathered into subordinate species and distinguished from each other modally but not substantially or essentially” (Conway 2009, 17). Creatures are described as having one Father, God-in-Christ, and “one mother, that unique substance or entity from which all things have come forth, and of which they are the real parts and members” (Conway 2009, 17). I would interpret this “mother” to be the Third Substance itself, though Jonathan Bennett’s note on this passage expresses the view that the “mother” is the “universe of matter” (Conway 2009, 17), and that reference is being made to popular ideas in which the female provides only undifferentiated matter and the differentiating push comes from the male seed (a view which Conway explicitly rejected, see below).

It is, at any rate, clear that Conway does not subscribe to the view that various created beings belong to essentially different species, since

if a creature were entirely limited by its own individuality, totally constrained and confined within the very narrow boundaries of its own species, then no medium could enable it to change into something else, no creature could attain further perfection and a greater share of divine goodness, and creatures couldn’t act and react on each other in various ways.

(Conway 2009, 18)



In other words, a lessening of the independent nature of individual creatures through their partaking of a common substance gives them greater autonomy, in the sense that they have freedom to change. This becomes clearer when we understand that this is not simply the ability to improve morally, or otherwise, during a lifetime, but involves palingenesis: because creatures are of a common substance, it is possible for an individual creature to change itself for the better through a series of reincarnations—something which she believes is entailed by God’s infinite goodness. She also considers it obvious, *contra* Descartes (whose theory of the *bête machine* she does not even dignify by mentioning at this point), that an animal such as a horse has a spirit capable of thought, sense and love (Conway 2009, 19). Given this, it is consistent with the divine goodness that it is changeable “in such a way that it can continually and infinitely move towards the good” unless blocked by some transgression on its part. (Conway [2009, 21] believes animals to be capable of transgressions and, in this context, cites the passages in *Leviticus* ordering of the killing of animals that have killed humans or engaged in sexual intercourse with them.) Therefore, a horse that has served its master faithfully should be rewarded with an infinite progress towards perfection. However, the nature of being a horse is not such as to admit an infinite journey towards perfection (and, besides, the world may become unsuitable for horses in the future!) Therefore, sooner or later, the horse will be transformed into a human being, just as human beings who have behaved brutishly in their lifetimes may be punished by being reincarnated as beasts. She explains how all creatures are on an infinite pathway towards perfection, though they may never arrive at the perfection of God, in the same way that a geometrical figure with straight sides can never become a circle though the adding of an infinite number of sides:

The body/spirit difference is a matter of degree: a thing can be pretty close to being a body or quite a long way from being a spirit. And because spirit is the more excellent of the two in the true and natural order of things, the more spiritual a creature is the closer it is to God unless it degenerates in some other way; because God, as we all know, is the highest spirit. So a body can become more and more spiritual, without end, because God, the first and highest spirit, is infinite and can’t have any corporeality in his constitution.

(Conway 2009, 26)

Centuries before Cantor, it is implicit in Conway’s argument that some infinities are larger than others: the nature of the individual creature is necessarily less than the infinity of God, but it is infinite nevertheless, and it has an autonomous nature which makes it capable of undertaking infinite progress in the direction of God, without every fully attaining it.



## 5. Conway and the Question of Gender

It is undeniable that Conway advanced the cause of women's socio-political autonomy by the very act of becoming a philosopher in the 17th century, by engaging in religious and philosophical debate, and by daring to critique eminent male philosophers in her writings, even though she was reluctant to publish them. The implications of her system itself in terms of the politics of gender are more complex. The 1990s and early 21st century have seen the publication of a number of works of feminist scholarship which have helped to give Conway her rightful place in the canon of Western philosophy. However, I would take issue with some aspects of their interpretations.

Sarah Hutton's 2004 *Anne Conway. A Woman Philosopher* focuses on locating her thought in the 17th-century context and brilliantly demonstrates both its originality and the way in which it exists in a web of interdependence, showing marks of influence from the Cambridge Platonists, the Lurianic Kabbalah, the Van Helmonts and the "experimental Physick" of Boyle, Greatrakes, and Stubbe, though, as Hutton also points out, this does not detract from her achievement as an original thinker, and it would be a mistake to "coat-tail" her by over-emphasizing the similarity of her thought to that of Leibniz (Hutton 2004, 8). The feminist aspect of the work is mainly the uncontroversial one of documenting and celebrating her place as a woman who had made herself at home in the philosophical milieu of her day.

Other feminist scholars writing on Conway have placed greater emphasis upon her continuing relevance for the political and social issues of our day. They have focused on the more obviously gynocentric aspects of her philosophy, such as the theme of the interconnectedness of nature in Conway as an ontology congenial to ecofeminism and ecojustice, and upon her critique of Cartesian dualism as having positive implications in challenging a paradigm in which women were all too often identified with matter/body and men with spirit/soul.

The feminist nature of Conway's critique of Descartes has been particularly emphasized. For example, Coudert and Corse, in the introduction to their modern translation of Conway, place her, along with Elizabeth of Bohemia, at the beginning of a tradition of feminist critiques of dualism. Comparing Conway's philosophy with Elizabeth of Bohemia's unanswered queries on the way in which an immaterial soul and a material body can possibly interact, they remark:

It is significant that two women raised the same objection to Cartesian dualism. [. . .] It is the more significant because this is precisely the same objection that modern feminists have raised and continue to raise against the idea that mind and body, or reason and emotion, are antithetical.

(Coudert and Corse 1996, in Conway 1996, xvii)



There are indeed many connections between Elizabeth of Bohemia and Conway (including their friendship with van Helmont and interest in Quakerism) and instances of what one might call “sexist Cartesianism” have been amply documented by Harvey and Okruhlik (1992) and others. However, it has not, I believe, been convincingly demonstrated that a rigorous Cartesian system of dualism is necessary in order to connect females metaphorically with the body and males with the soul. Any of the less rigorous systems of dualism in existence for thousands of years before Descartes will do just as well, and as Sutton has pointed out, there were many different kinds of dualisms in 17th-century philosophy which resist neat ideological mapping:

Certainly the language of control, subordination, and dissent is pervasive in many later seventeenth-century works on the soul, and not only in discussions of the passions: ongoing controversies in medical psychology and the moral physiology of self were often negotiated in charged politico-theological settings (Iliffe 1995; Suzuki 1997; Hawkins 2002; Martensen 2004; Thomson 2008). But the accounts of body and soul in question were multifaceted, and resist neat mapping onto ideological agendas. In general matter theory many of these philosophers, on occasion at least, still invoked various properties and powers which do not fit with an austere mechanism of entirely passive material substance (Henry 1986a; Schaffer 1987; Dempsey 2006).

(Sutton 2013, 14)

Even Conway herself, though a philosophical monist, can be called a dualist insofar as she *refers* to the body/spirit dichotomy, and one problematic passage in the *Principles* should warn us not to make too easy an equation of adherence to/rejection of Cartesianism and adherence to/rejection of binary oppositions between male and female in which the male is metaphorically associated with the higher value:

In every visible creature there is **b** body and **s** spirit, or **s** a more active and **b** a more passive principle, which are appropriately called male and female because they are analogous to husband and wife.

(Conway 2009, 24)

Bennett comments on this passage that “Our author doesn’t mean to align male/female with body/spirit or with spirit/ body. Her point is that body and spirit are a co-operating pair” (Conway 2009, 24). I agree with the first part of the statement, if construed to mean that Conway does not mean to state that females are less spiritual than males. However, there is also a hint of special pleading by Bennett in the cause of excising an unpalatable opinion. Certainly, the concept of a co-operating pair is present, and Conway elsewhere writes of the male-female relationship in terms of affectionate union. Nevertheless, the analogy does include an assertion of female



passivity. The passage is especially interesting since Conway does *not* accept the Aristotelian view of sexual generation, but believes a child is begotten by a mixture of male seed and female seed (Latin: *semen*) (Conway 2009, 24). The nature of the child is determined by which of the two predominates or by the intervention of an external factor. We can take female *semen* merely as a hypothetical entity foreshadowing the discovery of the ovum, or we can assume that Conway thought vaginal fluids to contain the “seed” of a child in the same way as male semen does. The important point is that the female is not seen to be the passive partner in the biological role of conceiving offspring—indeed she may be the more active. What then constitutes this female passivity? It is not possible to know exactly what Conway had in mind when she wrote this passage, but I would conjecture that she might have been thinking of male and female roles in sexual intercourse and have been equating penetration with the “active.” Be that as it may, one must concede that Conway has not entirely abandoned some traditional dualist views on male and female roles along with Cartesian dualism. She is also poles apart from the kind of feminist discourse which objects to the valuation of the spiritual above the physical. She very clearly states her views on this matter in relation to her views on infinity, emphasizing that there can be infinite progress in the direction of spirit and light, but not of matter and darkness:

It is indeed in the nature of a creature (unless it degenerates) to become ever more like the creator. But no creature can become more and more corporeal without end, in the way it can become more and more a spirit. Why the difference? Because nothing is •in every way contrary to God; •infinitely and unchangeably bad, as God is infinitely and unchangeably good; •infinitely dark as God is infinitely light; •infinitely a body with no spirit, as God is infinitely spirit with no body.

So nothing can become darker and darker to infinity, although it can become brighter and brighter to infinity; and nothing can go from bad to worse to infinity, although anything can become better and better to infinity.

(Conway 2009, 26)

This passage could also be cited in response to the reading of Conway advanced in Carol Wayne White’s 2008 *The Legacy of Anne Conway (1631–1679) Reverberations from a Mystical Naturalism*, which both situates Conway in the tradition of Romantic visionaries such as Blake, and presents her as a precursor of female theologians such as Rosemary Ruether, who see God neither as rootless transcendence nor as suffocating imminence, but as a matrix. Wayne White says:

I consider Ruether’s nature-based feminism a crucial and important stage in the ongoing dissolution of compartementalised, instrumentalised nature that Conway’s critique of Descartes anticipated. In its desire



to grasp the fullness and uniqueness of natural life, Ruether's ecotheological discourse reverberates with important values that emanate from Conway's early modern religious naturalism.

(Wayne White 2008, 106)

Although I agree with Wayne White that we can find parallels between the two authors and celebrate the oceanic sense of the universe proclaimed in their writings, it is nevertheless the case that Conway would probably have rejected Ruether's theology on the grounds that it does not sufficiently privilege the spiritual over the corporeal, and also that it focuses on embracing our finitude (Wayne White 2008, 107) whilst her own philosophy intends us to recognize our infinitude. As Andrea Brady (2011) has pointed out in her comparison of the 17th-century poet Katherine Philips and Anne Conway, there is a danger of neglecting the extent to which the idealist, Platonic tradition was important to 17th-century female thinkers.

The same point needs to be emphasized in the face of attempts to connect Conway closely with another of her female contemporaries, Margaret Cavendish. Jacqueline Broad, in the chapter on Conway in her 2002 *Women Philosophers of the Seventeenth Century*, is determined to link the two as female anti-dualist philosophers. Although she concedes that Cartesianism seemed a liberating philosophy for many women because of its insistence on the sexlessness of souls and because the new philosophy was accessible to female readers, since it was expressed in a clear style and did not require a classical education, Broad nevertheless makes it clear that she considers monism a more appropriate philosophy for feminists and goes to great lengths to emphasize the similarities between Conway's monism and the materialistic monism of her contemporary Margaret Cavendish (Broad 2002, 78). Despite the fact that Conway's monism could perhaps be more accurately described as a trinitarianism since she gives us three substances-in-one and that Cavendish's monism only applies to the created world, not to God, we are on the verge of being invited to admire a sisterhood of female quasi-materialist monists making a stand against the dominant masculinist ideology of Cartesian dualism. This view is problematic, to say the least, given Conway's clear rejection of Hobbesian materialism in *The Principles* and the evidence from her correspondence with More that she held Cavendish's thought in very low esteem. More had brushed off Cavendish's attempts to enter into a philosophical correspondence with him and permits himself a tone of open contempt in one of his letters to Conway, which Broad (2000, 70) herself quotes, in which he ironically refers to Cavendish as "this great Philosopher":

I wish your Ladiship were rid of your headache and paines, though it were no exchange for those of answering this great Philosopher. She is affrayd some man should quit his breeches and putt on a petticoat to answer her in that disguise, which your Ladiship need not. She expresses



this jealousie in her book, but I beleave she may be secure from any one giving her the trouble of a reply.

(More to Conway, [undated] 1665; in Nicholson, *Conway Letters*, 237)

That More should assume this tone in speaking of one aristocratic lady to another, given the exceedingly deferential nature of his correspondence with Conway, amply documented by Hutton (2004, 73–93), seems strongly to suggest that the two had previously discussed Lady Cavendish in unflattering terms and that he was confident that his witticisms at her expense would be well-received.

Finally, before making too rigid a connection between monism and feminism, one should also not lose sight of the fact that materialists, monists and atheists are also perfectly capable of being sexist, sometimes by invoking a brain-body dualism, and that theories of body and soul as existing on a continuum (not to mention aggressive critiques of Descartes) are not unique to female philosophers. The most obvious example of a 17th-century male author holding the view of body and soul as being on a continuum is Milton, who expresses a monism very similar to Conway in Book V of *Paradise Lost*, where the angel Raphael, after deigning to accept human food, tells Adam and Eve that their bodies may turn into spirit over time. The first part of this speech emphasizes the monistic nature of reality in terms recalling Conway's account of the First Substance:

To whom the winged Hierarch repli'd.  
O *Adam*, one Almighty is, from whom  
All things proceed, and up to him return,  
If not deprav'd from good, created all  
Such to perfection, one first matter all.

(Milton 1953, 199)

It then continues to explain that there are different degrees within this substance, represented by vital, animal and intellectual spirits, which although it does not include a monadological account, is nevertheless very similar to Conway's belief in the gradations of spirituality to be found within substance:

Indu'd with various forms, various degrees  
Of substance, and in things that live, of life;  
But more refin'd, more spiritous, and pure,  
As neerer to him plac't or neerer tending  
Each in thir several active Sphears assignd,  
Till body up to spirit work, in bounds  
Proportiond to each kind. So from the root  
Springs lighter the green stalk, from thence the leaves  
More aerie, last the bright consummate floure



Spirits odorous breathes: flours and thir fruit  
 Mans nourishment, by gradual scale sublim'd  
 To vital Spirits aspire, to animal,  
 To intellectual.

(Milton 1953, 199–200)

The angel also assures Adam that human and angelic natures should be seen as “Differing but in degree, of kind the same” (Milton 1953, 200) and that “Your bodies may at last turn all to spirit, /Improv’s by tract of time” (Milton 1953, 200). *Contra* those who assume a strong connection between opposition to dualism and feminism, one must point out that, unfortunately, Milton’s adherence to monism did not prevent him from asserting Adam’s superiority over Eve!

I believe that that we shall do fuller justice to Conway’s work if, instead of focusing exclusively on her kinship with other female philosophers in opposition to a dominant male discourse, or on the feminist implications of her non-dualist ontology, we also seek to explore the feminist implications of her conceptions of autonomy, individualism and individual responsibility, and in particular, her doctrine of infinite human potentiality. These have hitherto been ignored by feminist scholarship, and understandably so, since they are not so obviously (or fashionably) gynocentric as other aspects of her work. However, the concept of autonomous infinity, just as much as that of cosmic unity, may be inspirational from a feminist perspective.

## 6. Singular-Plurality and Ethical Responsibility

It is an integral aspect of Conway’s system that each creature is composed of an infinite or, at least, uncountable number of bodies and spirits existing within it:

Just as a body, whether of man or of brute, is nothing but a countless multitude of bodies gathered into one and arranged in a certain structure, so the spirit of man or brute is also a countless multitude of spirits united in this body; they are rank-ordered in such a way that one is the principle ruler, another has second place, a third commands others below itself, and so on down—just as in an army. This is why creatures are called “armies” and God is called “the leader” of those armies. [. . .] So every human being, indeed every creature, contains many spirits and bodies. (The Jews call men’s many spirits “Nizzuzuth,” meaning “sparks.”)

(Conway 2009, 25)

This position might be conjectured to open the door to all manner of anxieties: to undermine personal identity and cast doubt on whether the soul can continue to exist after death, and, if it does, on exactly who is to be



judged after death. Yet it is significant that Conway's sense of the interconnectedness of the universe, and of the multiplicity within the human soul, does not preclude the sense of individual responsibility.<sup>1</sup> She believed that all the individual monads which constitute a living individual would simply be judged all together as a group after death, as they were collectively responsible for the person's actions in this life, just as a parliament or committee may be held responsible for certain actions. A secular version of this would be to maintain the concept of the autonomous individual, responsible for their actions whilst remaining aware of the neurological complexity and the various internal and external stimuli which underlie decision-making. The implication for the question of women's autonomy is that women, like men, should consider themselves responsible creatures, despite the fact that some of the "spirits" within them—which today we might call hormones—on occasion encourage them to act in ways which may not be consistent with reason. Naturally, the point is equally valid for male hormones and autonomy. However, in the case of women, there is a long tradition of discourse which suggests that women are not responsible for their actions and cannot even be considered rational beings, when suffering from adolescence, pre-menstrual tension, menstruation, pregnancy, the menopause, sexual attraction, sexual rejection and so on, whilst male lack of rationality is less often attributed to testosterone levels. The significance of Conway's position here is simply that she does not mention gender in her account. For women, as for men, the infinite entities and the infinite causal pathways within us which determine our decision-making do not prejudice our ultimate autonomy and accountability.

## 7. Autonomous Self-perfection as Feminist Inspiration

Likewise, Conway does not mention gender specifically in her account of self-perfection, though her theory of palingenesis implies the possibility of a single creature living both male and female lives. The idea of self-perfection as a universal ideal is again, I would argue, of more relevance to women, simply because this ideal when pursued by women has often been confused with selfishness and abandonment of domestic responsibilities.

As an example of the way in which the concept of autonomous action and self-perfection has been inspirational to the feminist movement, I would like to return to a significant moment in 19th-century feminist thought, Elizabeth Barrett-Browning's philosophical narrative poem *Aurora Leigh*. In one of the best-known passages in the poem, the heroine rejects a marriage proposal from her cousin, the acceptance of which would have involved subordinating herself to her husband's socio-political causes rather than to her own plan to devote herself to poetry, a plan which he had dismissed as selfish female vanity. She replies to him with the words:

You misconceive the question like a man,  
Who sees a woman as the complement



Of his sex merely. You forget too much  
 That every creature, female as the male,  
 Stands single in responsible act and thought,  
 As also in birth and death. Whoever says  
 To a loyal woman, "Love and work with me,"  
 Will get fair answers, if the work and love,  
 Being good themselves, are good for her—  
 The best she was born for.

(Barrett-Browning, Section 2, 1864)

Conway's treatise is not, of course, an exhortation to women to follow this particular path towards self-determination as a thinker and writer, though her own life may be taken as an example of it. But her philosophy, with its insistence that each individual entity (female as the male) has infinite potentiality, a mission of self-perfection and the freedom to choose the way in which they will embark on it, could function as a matrix from which a greater sense of the necessity of women's socio-political autonomy can arise. This might lead us in the direction of feminist thinking which would place more emphasis on creating an environment which facilitates the flourishing of individual women (and, indeed, also individual men), and their right to exercise choice in the way that they exercise their abilities and talents. A feminism and a politics inspired by Conway's ontology would recognize that this flourishing will usually occur, to some extent, within a social framework involving relations of interdependence, but would not privilege collaboration for its own sake, and whilst recognizing the existence of social disadvantages, of different levels of ability, and of obstacles to opportunity, would not be afraid to speak of the infinite choices with which we are confronted and of the infinite potentiality in each of us.

## Note

- 1 This concept has some affinities with Ricoeur's (1994) notion of narrative identity in *Oneself as Another*—the ability to identify oneself as someone who has done certain things—as a basis for ethical responsibility. This concept is also intimately related to the question of autonomy: it is just because an individual is autonomous that they are capable of being held to account.

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# 7 Independence as Relational Freedom

## A Republican Account Derived From Mary Wollstonecraft

*Alan Coffee*

In spite of its connotations in everyday use, the term independence as republicans understand it is not a celebration of individualism or self-reliance. Instead, it embodies an acknowledgement of the importance of personal and social relationships in people's lives and reflects our connectedness rather than separateness. Independence is in this regard a relational ideal. This aspect of the concept of republican freedom as independence has not been widely discussed. Properly understood, however, I shall argue that it is a useful concept in addressing a fundamental problem in social philosophy that has preoccupied theorists of relational autonomy, namely how to reconcile the idea of individual human agency with the inevitable and necessary influence of other people, both directly and indirectly as part of our social environment. I derive my account primarily from Mary Wollstonecraft's work which I believe to have been highly innovative in its appreciation of the effects of social influences on human agency whilst remaining largely overlooked by current republican theorists as a historical source.<sup>1</sup>

My purpose in this chapter is to set out the internal logic of republican independence showing how the individual agent is reconciled to the collective decisions and intentions of the population through the central concept of arbitrariness. I frame my discussion in the context of the particular problem of reconciling social influence and individual agency in oppressive environments, raising the difficult question of how to recognize the profound and pervasive effect that domineering and marginalizing cultural conditions have on subjected people's lives and on the choices they make, without thereby undermining or diminishing their status as self-governing agents. This is an especially difficult problem for many republicans because freedom is only considered to be undermined or reduced by intentional threats—those threats that can be attributed to the actions and decisions of individual agents, even if indirectly. Impediments that originate in the effects of collective cultural attitudes and social structures are said not to be traceable to individual intentions and are not thereby damaging to freedom. I outline a response that I derive from Wollstonecraft's conception of independence showing how republicans can use this ideal to address social and structural forms of domination.



The issue of social domination or oppression has also been one of the motivating problems that has driven the development of the ideal of relational autonomy. This is a subfield within the overall field of autonomy that wrestles with the dilemma outlined above of remaining committed to the importance and possibility of individual agency while acknowledging and seeking to understand the significant impact that social structures and cultural context have on individual autonomous action.<sup>2</sup> While relational autonomy theorists have at times noted that the republican concept contains some useful insights for their own approach, the two literatures—which have both emerged over more or less the same period over the past two or three decades—have not often been brought together in a sustained manner.<sup>3</sup> There are several understandable reasons why this might have been so. First, republican writers themselves have often neglected the problem of social oppression. Second, the basic concepts of autonomy and freedom, while related and often used to refer to overlapping ideas, are not identical and so the insights of one field do not necessarily translate to the other. A third reason may be that while feminist philosophers have largely driven the development of relational theories of autonomy, there has long been a suspicion by many feminists of republicanism, given its patriarchal history that has been seen to stifle rather than liberate women as agents (Pateman 2007, Phillips 2000). This stance has diminished somewhat in recent years thanks both to the work of important contemporary women writing as republicans as well as to studies that position Mary Wollstonecraft as a significant political theorist who reconceptualized many parts of the republican framework to accommodate and address feminist concerns.<sup>4</sup>

Drawing on some of these latter republican studies, Catriona Mackenzie has analyzed Wollstonecraft as prefiguring and anticipating the contemporary debate about relational autonomy (2016). I find Mackenzie's arguments both perceptive and persuasive and am in substantial agreement with her position. She makes clear in her discussion that her concern is with how Wollstonecraft foreshadows current work on relational autonomy rather than on Wollstonecraft's specifically republican structures and tools (68). With this in mind, my final purpose in this chapter will be to highlight three particular contrasts in how relational autonomy and independence theories frame their respective approaches to the basic problem of social domination and individual agency.

Although I am articulating a relational formulation for independence as freedom from arbitrary rule as a relational ideal in its own right, the inevitable backdrop is the extensive literature on relational autonomy. The terms independence, freedom, and autonomy are related but distinct. While they are often conflated (and, as ever in philosophy, there are no fixed definitions of any of these notions) the words are often located within specific literatures and discussions, each having its own concerns and reference points, and drawing upon distinct frameworks and assumptions. There are understandable reasons for this. Autonomy is often understood with reference to



Kantian and post-Kantian developments in philosophy while the classical period of republican writings extends from Rome and comes to an end at the end of the late 18th century.<sup>5</sup> In its contemporary form, focusing on non-domination, republican discourse is heavily focused on freedom as a political ideal rather than as a condition of moral agency or as part of a metaphysical account of the self.<sup>6</sup> Much of the literature on relational autonomy addresses these wider concerns. Mackenzie, for example, grounds her approach in a “social ontology of persons—that is, a conception of persons that emphasizes the role of embodied social practices (including linguistic and cultural practices), social group identities, and historical contingencies in the formation of our individual practical identities” (2014, 21), while Jennifer Nedelsky rejects “approaches that treat relations as peripheral rather than central and constitutive” of the human self (2011, 7). These are reasonable approaches to important questions, and I find Mackenzie’s approach especially illuminating. Nevertheless, I restrict my focus to the political dimension for the sake of clarity. To this extent, as I outline it, independence will be consistent with a range of substantive moral and metaphysical accounts of autonomy, even if its historical progenitors would have taken clear positions on these (Coffee 2016, 2017).

Rather than with definitions, my concern is with the issues that relational theories of freedom and autonomy address. Here autonomy and independence share the same basic sense of self-government or self-legislation, having a common etymology albeit from different roots. The traditional synonym for independence was of a person able to act *sui iuris*, where the Latin mirrors the Greek for self (*sui, auto*) and law (*iuris, nomos*).<sup>7</sup> I take the idea of self-government as my starting point. Self-government is itself a complex ideal. It connotes an ideal of having the ability to shape the contours of one’s own life, taking control from within oneself rather than being directed from outside influences. This contains several separate but internally related aspects. Mackenzie distinguishes three elements of autonomy: self-determination (“the freedom and opportunities necessary for determining the direction of one’s own life”), self-government (“the competences necessary for making authentic decisions about one’s life”), and self-authorization (“to regard oneself, and to be regarded by others, as having the normative authority” to have the other two capacities) (2016, 80). She finds all of these elements in Wollstonecraft’s account of independence. I agree but articulate these differently along two dimensions, independence of mind and civil or political independence.

The structure of this chapter is as follows. In the first section, I address some misconceptions about independence. In the second, I identify three distinctive features of the internal logic of freedom as independence that give it a relational character: first, that the person is always located within a community (“free person in the free state”); second, that the individual and collective perspectives are connected through the mediating role played by the notion of arbitrariness; and, third, that a causal relationship exists



linking each person's freedom as independence such that the dependence of one class of people jeopardizes the independence of the whole community. In section III, I consider the issue of structural domination in which systematic oppressive forms of social and cultural organization combine to undermine independence, especially by restricting and distorting the range of background values and concepts that are available in public discourse and by creating conditions that often lead to marginalized people developing an internalized sense of inferiority and acceptance of their situation.

1.

Independence is a confusing term. According to Nedelsky, independence is an individualistic concept that emphasizes the boundaries that separate people (1989, 2011). This individualism, she maintains, is characteristic of liberal thinking which she identifies as being constructed around a notion of what she describes as "autonomy as independence" in contrast to relational autonomy (2011, 3–8). Such an individualistic way of thinking, Nedelsky argues, is both misleading, because these boundaries are artificial, and damaging, because drawing them obscures and undermines the ties between us that make any notion of the individual meaningful. The result is that we are presented with a false choice. "When autonomy is identified with individual independence and security from collective power," she says, "the choice is posed between admitting collective control and preserving autonomy in any given realm of life" (1989, 14; 2011, 126–7). "Such a dichotomy," she adds, "forecloses a whole range of social arrangements—at least to anyone who values autonomy." These arrangements are those that would foster and protect the social relationships that make personal freedom possible. Nedelsky regards the high value placed on independence as characteristic of what she calls "liberal individualism," something she identifies as "the dominant mode of thought," whose ideals inform and permeate the "set of (often unexamined) frameworks and presuppositions that are deep in Anglo-American culture." These features influence the structure of our social, political, and legal institutions as well as our background cultural way of thinking (2011, 8, 41). The effect of the value that is placed on "autonomy as independence" is that people come to think of themselves as self-contained—often self-made and self-reliant—individuals without appreciating or understanding the role that relationships played in making this quality possible both as an ability and in the options it affords them. Dependence and mutual interdependence are inevitable features of daily life for us all, she argues (26–30). If we both fail to recognize this and even overtly denigrate these aspects of social reality, then we can hardly construct the most effective or most just set of institutions and practices within which to live.

Although I believe that Nedelsky overstates her case, I am sympathetic with much of what she says about the dangers of individualism, especially in how it can come to influence the social, conceptual and normative structures



of society. I too distance myself from individualism of the sort that she describes. I do not, however, recognize in her description the concept of independence as I use it. Underpinning Nedelsky's critique is a rejection of the idea that autonomy is incompatible with interference from others (2011, 97–9). Rightly, in my opinion, she maintains that interference of certain kinds is necessary for the development of the very capacity to act autonomously. Accordingly, she argues, we should focus on the structure of power relations between people, developing institutions and practices that promote constructive power relations (2011, 64). To put this in republican terms, Nedelsky's hostility to the ideal of autonomy as independence is tied to her deeper rejection of the idea of freedom as non-interference, which is the view that freedom is curtailed only and always where there is interference in a person's intended actions. Republicans, too, reject the non-interference definition of freedom, arguing instead for a conception of freedom as non-domination which is precisely an attempt to constrain and restructure power relations.<sup>8</sup> (This is not to say that she endorses freedom as non-domination. Nedelsky does not discuss this concept in *Law's Relations* and the structure of freedom as independence from arbitrary power is different from her notion of relational autonomy.)<sup>9</sup>

In developing the idea of independence as a relational form of freedom I am drawing on the historical republican tradition. Another source of confusion, therefore, is that there can be no doubt that this tradition's most well-known representatives have understood independence in just these bounded individualistic and self-reliant terms. To name just one, Richard Price—a mentor to Wollstonecraft and her close friend—identifies as the paradigm of freemen, the “independent and hardy yeomanry” of the American provinces who were “trained to arms, instructed in their rights, cloathed in homespun . . . [and] drawing plenty from the ground” (Price 1992, 145). While such rugged individualism highly prized, dependence was also despised. Dependence in republican discourse was synonymous with servitude in a context where slaves were reviled and shunned. Not only were slaves abject in their inability to stand up for themselves and to take their own decisions but this very condition was said to foster and generate ignoble patterns of behavior such as cowardice, sycophancy and deceit which were regarded as being incompatible with the virtues of the independent citizen-agent (Skinner 2008, Coffee 2014).

In response, I should like to emphasize that these sentiments—the valorizing of the self-made, self-reliant individual and the denigration of those who are regarded as dependent—have no part in the formal meaning of the term independence as I define it (and as I derive it from Wollstonecraft), and neither do they have any place in its internal logic (Coffee 2013, 2014). Indeed, it is as a corrective to these unhelpful historical attitudes, which have become deeply ingrained in republican theorizing, that I have turned to the writings of women and other marginalized writers such as ex-slaves and Reconstruction-era black writing as my primary source of inspiration



(Coffee 2017, 2018 forthcoming). Women in the 18th century knew what it was like to be always and inescapably dependent on others. However, while writers such as Wollstonecraft sought to escape the clutches of dependence they did not despise or reject the fact of needing care or assistance. The predominant thought was not to achieve an isolated existence but to stand among equals, protected from the abuses of power.

In light of these misconceptions, an inevitable question is why we should continue to use the term rather than discard it in favor of a more apt label such as “interdependence.” One reason for retaining it echoes Nedelsky’s own justification for persevering with the concept of autonomy despite its confusing connotations (2011, 41–5). Independence, like autonomy, is a foundational and indispensable moral, political and social value that is of great importance to both individuals and communities. It is too important an ideal to surrender or lose sight of and the very misconceptions it generates are what make it all the more necessary to reconceive. A second reason is that independence is a historically significant term for personal and civic freedom. Although republicans often refer today to “non-domination,” following Pettit, this use represents only a small part of the considerable literature that stretches back to the Roman Republic. There is a danger in breaking the connection with this historic idea that we lose the insights, possibilities and subtleties of this complex ideal. Finally, independence is also Wollstonecraft’s own word. For scholars of her work, to replace it with a proxy such as “interdependence” would distort her meaning.

Wollstonecraft was acutely aware of her state of dependence and self-consciously described her condition, and the condition of all women, as slaves because of their inescapable subjection to male power (Coffee 2013). As a wife she had no legal standing on her own but was instead covered by her husband who represented them both, something she described vividly in her novel *Maria*.<sup>10</sup> Even in a happy marriage to a man who would never treat her as less than an equal, the brutal fact remained that a wife was wholly in his power and could never act on her own account. In their own marriage, Wollstonecraft and Godwin may perhaps have been mutually interdependent (we might suppose), but this does not negate the importance of independence so much as express an additional value to be considered. Wollstonecraft gives two grounds for this. First, she highlights the psychological importance of knowing that she is an equal, an agent in her own right who is a personality separate from others who can make her own decisions and judgements. This does nothing to deny the fact that our lives are intimately and intricately bound up with one another. Rather she argues that true interdependence comes only from a position in which each party starts as an equal—morally and legally—with the mutual respect that this requires.<sup>11</sup>

The second part of her argument draws on the old republican saw that we simply cannot rely on the continuing goodwill of those who have unconstrained power over us. Republicans have, for example, always been



suspicious of the claim that they had nothing to fear from the king because he would never abuse his power since this said nothing of how his successor might behave. Bonded slaves, too, knew that even though their master might have promised them their liberty when he died, all too often the executor would disregard this when the estate was divided.<sup>12</sup> So it was with women who entered seemingly loving marriages only for things to change.<sup>13</sup> Wollstonecraft would not, I believe, accept the alternative rendering “interdependence” to replace “independence” where this would obscure or soften the vital protections that independence provides. In emphasizing our connectedness, we must not lose sight of the real dangers of dependence on arbitrary forces without protection and the ease with which the powerful can take advantage of their dominance while professing mutuality.

Independence in Wollstonecraft’s sense does not indicate that one does not need the help of others. Rather what is required is that the resources that a person needs in order to function as an equal in society are available as a matter of right rather than as acts of charity or grace. An elderly person, for example, who is now unable to work remains independent by being entitled to an old age pension, just as a severely disabled person has a right to the appropriate forms of care. It is consistent with independence that a mother of young children either receives support for childcare (if she chooses paid work, for example) or has access to an income that allows her to care for her own children (Coffee 2014). Individuals requiring assistance of these kinds should not feel guilty or beholden. Instead, they have an expectation that its provision is an entitlement for anyone considered to be an equal collaborator and member of society. This is not a matter of demanding one’s rights but of understanding one’s equality. Of course, the love and intimacy that so often are part of the caring relationships that are so important in all our lives cannot be compelled by law. But, we can seek to secure for each person the means for protection against abuse.

## 2.

Independence, like autonomy, is an ideal of self-government. This is both an individual and a collective concept, although it is grounded in the concern that individuals should govern their behavior according to their own wills rather than being controlled externally by the wills of others. Two aspects of this definition are important to note. First, control is understood in terms of relationships of power rather than of actual coercion. Second, control must be resilient. We are not self-governing if it is by mere chance that we are not the objects of unwarranted interference. Rather, we must be beyond its reach. In republican terms, this means that we must be independent of the discretionary (or arbitrary) power that others might wield over us.<sup>14</sup> This is a matter of our status within a collective body of people rather than of our particular abilities or powers as individuals.



One can discern something of the character of an approach to political theory through its imagery. Within the social contract tradition, for example, the starting point is that of the pre-political individual who consents to be part of a collective body because of the net advantage. Although there is some loss of freedoms in joining the state, overall freedom is said to increase. This contrasts with the republican approach within which independence is situated. Rather than building up from the individual towards the political community in its conception of freedom, the republican model starts with the fact of community. The image is that of “the free man in the free state” (Skinner 2010). Freedom is not compromised or netted off against unfreedom within the state but instead, in Pettit’s word, instantiated by it (1997, 106–7). Personal freedom is made possible only in relationship with others and we work from both ends—up from the individual and down from the collective—to derive the meaning of this ideal as well as its parameters and scope. To understand and locate these, we have to understand the central role played by the concept of the common good around which the whole of republican independence, and, by extension, the whole republican framework, is constructed.

Independence is only possible in community with others for the simple reason that outside of society the resilience condition could not be met. People would each be exposed to the potential of unrestrained power from anyone that happened to cross their path. Even lone individuals or hermits are not truly independent in this sense since they cannot escape the danger that groups of bandits might discover their whereabouts and overpower them. Independence on this scale requires a strong force to back it up, which requires the cooperation of others. Freedom is, therefore, a necessarily social ideal. Republicans take the force that enables freedom to be the law. This law inevitably faces a delicate task. If it is to guarantee rather than threaten my independence, it must reflect my ideas about what I wish to do. If it does this for me, it must do so for all those others over whom it governs, on pain of being arbitrary for them. The law, therefore, must represent and uphold the people’s shared interests, or in other words, their common good. Identifying and agreeing what is in the common good is the primary theoretical and practical concern for republicans. This is the criterion by which the notion of arbitrariness is understood, where arbitrariness is part of the meaning of freedom. The common good is the reference point by which a people distinguish freedom from oppression, or historically, servitude. Anyone whose ideas are not included in the shared ideal of the common good, and who is therefore ruled by a law that does not represent their interests and perspectives, is ruled arbitrarily and thereby unfree.

Having the common good as its focal point, independence is both a socially determined and a necessarily inclusive ideal. By its definition, the idea of the common good of the members—or citizens—used by a political community must reflect the actual ideas and perspectives of all those it claims to represent. While there is scope for republicans to differ on the balance



between the extent to which the common good is objectively determined by reason or the moral law, or varies with the subjective opinions of the people, republicans are agreed that an ideal of the common good cannot be imposed but must be endorsed by the citizens themselves. It follows that the people must deliberate in an open and accessible manner and discuss their shared objectives, interests and values. This requires both a suitable institutional framework and a population of individuals who are capable of and willing to engage with the process. The role that others play in making our independence possible points to another of its relational features.

As I understand Wollstonecraft, freedom is constituted by three component parts each of which is causally dependent on each of the others: independence, equality, and virtue.<sup>15</sup> To be independent we must be equals within a society in which that equality is respected and protected, which is what is meant by virtue.<sup>16</sup> If any one of these elements is diminished, it has a corresponding effect in weakening the others. Dependence, for example, introduces inequalities between the powerful and the weak, while inequalities by placing people asymmetrically with respect to the common good weakens people's resolve to behave with virtue. Relationships of both dependence and inequality are said, in the traditional terminology, to corrupt virtue. They do this for both parties to the relationship, for both dominator and dominated alike. The powerful are motivated not to maintain the collective good but to protect their advantage, while the powerless are not in a position to think in a high-minded way but must seek any benefit that they can by whatever means. Each side, therefore, views the other not as a fellow citizen, but as a threat and a rival. Significantly, the process of corruption is said to spread from one bilateral case of domination to others as more and more people are drawn into the conflict. Once individuals have lost their commitment to the common good, then this affects their behavior in other relationships, particularly where they seek to gain support for their cause from others (a man dominating his wife, for example, may try to persuade others that this is an acceptable, even good, thing so that he does not stand out).

No less than virtue, the condition of equality is a demanding one. It is not enough that people are equal in some respects but not others because the process of corruption spreads from one sphere of social life to the others. Continuing with the domestic situation, for example, where a wife is dependent on her husband financially then this undermines her independence in other areas of life because she cannot risk displeasing him and losing his goodwill. Legal and political equality mean little if one cannot pay one's bills. Similarly, people's economic independence is compromised if they lack the basic legal or political rights to protect their interests. As pockets of inequality and dependence spring up throughout society, so the process of corruption spreads both horizontally, from one bilateral relationship of domination to another, and vertically, to infect the institutions that are responsible for maintaining independence in the state. The process



is both relentless and imperceptible, spreading like rust, to use Madame Roland's image, eventually to corrupt the virtue of society as a whole as the moral community is replaced by an arena of competing private interests.<sup>17</sup> And, like rust, the process once started is difficult to arrest or reverse. Each person's freedom, then, is tied to that of everybody else.<sup>18</sup>

We can now see how integral relationships of care are not only to the independence of the individuals who receive support but also to the freedom of the entire community. People in need of care must not be allowed to become dependent in the republican sense because this would introduce a corrupting factor into society that would eventually come to threaten the freedom of us all. This possibly sounds far-fetched. But the numbers involved are considerable. We can think, for example, about how a society treats its elderly population. In the UK there are around 12 million people of state pensionable age which represents some 30% of the workforce (in the USA, this percent is 20%).<sup>19</sup> As people in this age group come to need increasing amounts of care, if they lack adequate resources, this can have several effects. Where the costs of caring for one's parents rise, for example, then children are forced to make difficult decisions. They may perhaps be forced to turn to shoddy care homes and they may come to resent the burden and the feelings of guilt that emerge. Trust between generations may then erode, and younger people realizing that they will have to save for themselves become hardened to the plight of others. Low-paid care workers can become cynical and alienated and even take out these feelings on those in their care. Once dependence and inequality are introduced then the effects on virtue can quickly start to unravel across different sectors and sections of the population. If the example of the elderly seems a stretch from historic republicanism, the structure of this argument mirrors the classical arguments for why republics should not allow either slavery or monarchy to take root in their societies.<sup>20</sup>

The right to receive appropriate kinds of care and support does not, of course, remove the need for fostering intimate, loving family relations. These are part of the social norms that support independence rather than independence being an ideal that opposes them. If families and other carers need greater support from the state to ensure that the necessary level of loving and personalized care can be maintained, then this too is a duty of the state to uphold.<sup>21</sup> In short, the independence of both the carer and the cared for must be prioritized.

### 3.

A problem that many feminists will have immediately spotted with the model of independence outlined above was its reliance on an ideal of the common good as representative and inclusively defined. Identifying any such ideal would be a problematic undertaking at the best of times but given the long history of marginalization and oppression of women then the prospects seem vanishingly slender. Not only has there been a long history



of sexism in republican theory but much of its core terminology—citizen, civic duty, public and private, as well as independence itself—can be seen to have taken on gendered and exclusionary nuances and meanings.<sup>22</sup> This presents a genuinely challenging obstacle and is effectively an application of a longstanding issue of circularity in republican theory: citizens are only free in a free state, while a state is only free where its citizens are free. In other words, it takes an independence-supporting community to produce independent citizens, and yet such a community can only be created by people who are already independent.

A related problem concerns what republicans are to say about women's agency where they live in flawed and non-ideal societies. This issue has sometimes been expressed as the "agency dilemma" (Khader 2011, Mackenzie 2015, 48). If we accept that social circumstances shape and direct our identities, preferences and capacities, then under oppressive conditions we are confronted with a difficult choice. People in difficult circumstances often make what appear to be bad choices, or at least choices that would not seem to be in their best interests—for example, by reducing rather than increasing their overall life options or acting on social stereotypes such as that of the dutiful housewife whose fulfillment is only through serving her family—rather than authentically choosing for themselves how they want to direct their life.<sup>23</sup> We then face a troubling choice: do we accept that the choices made by members of the victimized group are autonomous (or independent) or do we "risk impugning [their] agency and opening the door to objectionably paternalistic and coercive forms of intervention in their lives" (Mackenzie 2015, 48)? We also risk constraining the diversity in potentially valuable or legitimate choice and ways of life by judging too harshly those we consider unenlightened or inauthentic.

I take these problems—the identification of the common good, and how we think of the agency of the oppressed—in turn.<sup>24</sup> Starting with the first, one of Wollstonecraft's great contributions to republican theory comes in the way that she addresses the use of structural domination. She analyzes independence as coming in two parts, both of which are necessary. In order to be free, we must be able to think for ourselves (have independence of mind) and be able to act on the outcome of our decisions (have political or civil independence). Independence of mind comes in two parts. First, there is the basic capacity for rational thought and self-reflection. Additionally, independent individuals must understand themselves as being both capable of and permitted to think in this way. Both parts are necessary but they should not be conflated. Oppressive social conditions might leave some people's critical capacities intact while leaving them believing that their exercise is "not for the likes of them." Political independence in turn entails not only having the requisite equal rights, ample resources and adequate opportunities, but also sufficient social standing. There must be a mutual recognition, or common knowledge, between citizens that they are each legitimate and equal co-members and creators of the shared social and political community.



Wollstonecraft addresses both parts of independence in a holistic account. However, throughout the second *Vindication*, she makes clear that she considers the gravest threat to women's freedom to be to their independence of mind in both aspects. Rights, for example, can do little to protect or empower those whose minds are vulnerable to being controlled by others. An important part of her solution comes from education.<sup>25</sup> In addition to formal education a wider social education is required through having the right role models and sources of inspiration and challenge in our lives so that we can develop practical skills and our imaginations.<sup>26</sup> Catharine Macaulay takes the concept of education much further.<sup>27</sup> Every interaction we have with others, she argues, no matter how small or random, has an effect on the development of our personality and beliefs. "Every error thrown out in conversation," she argues, "every sentiment which does not correspond with the true principles of virtue, is received by the mind, and like a drop of venomous poison will corrupt the mass with which it mingles" (1790, 103). This points to a highly insidious threat to women's independence of mind, one that comes from the entire structure of background social beliefs, attitudes, practices, habits, and values. In a patriarchal society, Wollstonecraft argues, all of these combine to thwart the progress not only of women's intellectual freedom but of men's, too, since both sexes inhabit the same set of restricted ideas.<sup>28</sup>

That people's social background is both inescapable and profoundly shapes their beliefs, character and self-image so deeply need not mean that they cannot still be independent. There are always power structures around us that will coerce and influence us, whether these are laws or simply the wills of other people. The republican response to threats to freedom is not to avoid them or to defeat them. Instead, it is to render them non-arbitrary. If other people's wills represent a threat to our own, for example, then the republican solution is to place everyone under a law that restrains all of our behavior. So it is with the social and cultural threat to freedom. Wollstonecraft analyzes the problem of a dominating culture using the same basic republican structure. People's inability to reason for themselves, and their subsequent tendency to take ideas on trust or to be influenced by what they read or hear, "makes them all their lives, the slaves of prejudices" (2014, 139).<sup>29</sup> She means slaves in a literal and formally republican sense of being subject to arbitrary power. That power is in this case cultural. Men enjoy a systematic power advantage—is often referred to today as "male privilege"—over women in virtue of the cultural and conceptual ideas that make up their shared social background. There is, of course, a significant difference between cultural and other sorts of power. Most forms of power—such as economic, political or physical power—can be regulated and constrained under appropriate non-arbitrary laws. In the case of a society's cultural background, by contrast, the direction of influence seems to be the other way around. It is culture that influences how we understand what the law means (Coffee 2015). And while the law is a codifiable body of regulations, culture is open-ended, diffuse, and constantly changing.



There is, however, another defining characteristic of non-arbitrariness that the law and the cultural background do share. A non-arbitrary law must be inclusive and representative of the interests and perspectives of all those it governs (on pain of otherwise being non-arbitrary). Since the law is the creation of the people for the protection of their freedom, it must be open to being made, challenged and refined or revised by each citizen. This is something that we can strive to replicate with cultural norms and ideas. We can open up the channels by which ideas and practices are spread so that women's voices and interests can be heard and gain a foothold. This is an enormous undertaking, of course. What is required is, in effect, what Wollstonecraft describes as a "revolution in female manners" (2014, 71, 210, 224). What she has in mind is not changing feminine behavior and etiquette so much as a radical remaking of the structure of economic, political, and social relations in which women interact with each other and with men. What is needed is for women to take part in redefining the role of both sexes. The result will be a collaborative reshaping of the social background. This is clearly a long-term project that Wollstonecraft concedes herself will take generations. But, it gives us a blueprint. Creating cultural change, of course, is neither easy nor quick. Wollstonecraft concedes that "it will require a considerable length of time to eradicate the firmly rooted prejudices which sensualists have implanted" (2014, 73). Nevertheless, she remains optimistic. It may take time to overcome "the inertia of reason; but, when it is once in motion, fables, once held sacred, may be ridiculed" and the whole edifice can be replaced (2009, 56).

If changing a culture and its social structures is the way to bring independence, the question remains as to what we are to say about women who are locked into existing sexist ways of life. Even taking account of the restriction in my focus here to considering independence as a political rather than metaphysical ideal or as an account of moral agency, I do not believe that the issues of denigration and paternalism arise in quite the same way as they do in the field of relational autonomy where they represent a prominent concern (Mackenzie 2016, 69). This stems from the bi-directional nature of independence as an account of the individual and the collective viewed in light of the institutional and cultural structures that organize and regulate their interactions. We cannot single out women in a patriarchal or sexist society as having their independence or agency diminished. In a corrupted society, no one emerges unscathed. Men may be in the dominant position, but they are no less dependent on a background that impairs their ability to reflect and think critically. Even "men of the greatest abilities," Wollstonecraft argues, "have seldom had sufficient strength to rise above the surrounding atmosphere" (2014, 68). The reason is twofold. First, their thinking is constrained by the same distorted and false ideas as women's, and, second, people in a dominant position come to have a particularly warped sense of reality as the information they receive is filtered to reinforce their sense of superiority. And so, just as "the page of genius [i.e. Rousseau] has always



been blurred by the prejudices of the age,” she concludes, “some allowance should be made for a sex, who like kings, always see things through a false medium.”

In arguing that both men and women are equally affected, I in no way mean to diminish the psychological and social harms that are done to oppressed and marginalized women. An internalized sense of inferiority or inadequacy can be crippling and the accompanying dangers of abuse, neglect and poverty cannot be overstated. My point is only that the subordinate party is never to be denigrated since dependent relationships always affect both parties—dominator and dominated—as well as the society that permits them. That some women are more onerously burdened remains a collective problem to resolve and the relevant resources must be made available to enable those who are dominated to come to be independent in as many respects as possible.

Does this, finally, mean that the state can intervene in dependent people’s lives? We must remember, first, that every member of society—all citizens—has a duty to be sufficiently independent. Willful dependence, no less than oppressed dependence, affects us all through the same set of corrupting processes. Some forms of life—the oft-cited “happy slave,” the stereotypically submissive, traditional wife to use Marina Oshana’s examples—will be incompatible with maintaining a free society (2006, 84). This is the flip side of the relational nature of independence which while it liberates also constrains, albeit non-arbitrarily. We affect others through our relationships just as they affect us and so we all have an obligation to behave in non-damaging ways. Some life choices will be ruled out. A young woman, for example, who marries without completing her education and then lives a subservient and highly sheltered life, uncritically reflecting the opinions of others around her, would not be independent. On the republican account, if such a way of life were replicated on a large scale throughout society, this would have a corrupting effect on virtue that would be harmful to the free character of the state.

This does not, however, open the door to state paternalism. Intrusive action cannot be justified because it is said to be good for the women concerned, as if government knows best. Intervention can only be justified if it is non-arbitrary which means it must be for the acknowledged common good where this is the outcome of a negotiation in which the affected women have a voice. Of course, in cases of subservience the targets of any action might not want a voice or be equipped to exercise it. In this case, the state may act only as far as is necessary to prevent the corruption of virtue so that as far as possible the relevant women’s lives are respected consistently with the conditions of basic independence. The result should be that a wide range of life-options are possible and in many cases, such as with women who choose to raise children without also engaging in paid labor, the rest of society must recognize its value and provide the necessary support to make it possible consistently with independence.



## 4.

Although I should very much have liked to locate independence as a relational ideal within the wide range of alternative accounts of autonomy on this issue, the restrictions of space mean that such a dialogue must wait. Instead, I have demonstrated that independence, especially as Wollstonecraft understood it, is a distinctive relational ideal that is both substantial in its own right and that can engage with wider discourses on social and structural forms of oppression. I have done this by articulating three characteristic features derived from the republican understanding of the causal relationship between personal and collective freedom. The resulting conception addresses several concerns that motivate relational autonomy theorists, including the way that it retains a commitment to the normative value of individual persons while remaining responsive to the fact of human vulnerability and acknowledging the complex ways in which people are socially, historically, and culturally embedded (Mackenzie 2014, 21–2). Seen in this light, I hope the door is now open for a fruitful engagement by republicans and Wollstonecraftians in this wider literature.

## Notes

- 1 Wollstonecraft is growing in importance as a republican (see the articles by Bergès, Coffee, Halldenius, James, and Pettit in Bergès and Coffee 2016, also Halldenius 2015). Outside of a relatively small contemporary literature, however, Wollstonecraft's presence in republican discourse is dwarfed by the standard canon of male historical sources and references to her are scanty.
- 2 See the editors' introduction to Mackenzie and Stoljar (2000) and several of the chapters included. Also Mackenzie 2016.
- 3 Marina Oshana (2006) briefly compares Pettit's model of freedom as non-domination with her own conception of autonomy, for example, concluding that while it is necessary non-domination is narrower and therefore insufficient for autonomy, pp. 153–4.
- 4 See, for example, Laborde (2008), as well as the scholars listed in footnote 1 above.
- 5 There are, of course, important overlaps. Wollstonecraft, for example, is likely to have had some familiarity with Kant's work. Like Kant, she also drew extensively on Rousseau's work and shows some echoes of Kantian ideas in her own work (Bergès 2011, 78; Halldenius 2007, 79).
- 6 This comes with a heavy caveat. Pettit makes an explicit and elaborate connection between his political, moral, and agency-related work (2007). Historically, Wollstonecraft was clearly concerned with these matters, and Macaulay's work on moral agency and the metaphysics of the self is extensive (Macaulay 1783).
- 7 This use derived from the classifications in Roman Law. See, for example, Gaius (Book I, § 48), "Another division in the law of Persons classifies men as either dependent [*alieni iuris*] or independent [*sui iuris*]" (1904, p. 75). See also Wirszubski 1968, p. 1. The convention of using independence and *sui iuris* interchangeably is found frequently throughout the history of republican writing.
- 8 I use freedom as non-domination interchangeably with independence here although my preference is almost always to use the historical term independence unless it is confusing not to do so. As I reconstruct Wollstonecraft's idea of



independence, there are several differences between her use and Pettit's contemporary notion of freedom as non-domination (Coffee 2016, 2017).

- 9 I do not develop this comparison with Nedelsky further since my aim in this section is only to clear up some misconceptions about the nature of independence itself.
- 10 "A wife," Wollstonecraft describes, is "as much a man's property as his horse, or his ass, she has nothing which she can call her own . . . and the laws of her country—if women have a country—afford her no protection or redress" (2005, 80–1).
- 11 Wollstonecraft discusses the need for equality and reciprocity in marriage in both *Vindications*. "Affection in the marriage state," for example, "can only be founded on respect" (1995, 22). See also 2014 (55–9).
- 12 See Frederick Douglass's story of Aunt Katy (2003, 135–143).
- 13 This is a central premise of Wollstonecraft's novel *Mary: A Fiction* (2008).
- 14 I set out my understanding of republican freedom more fully in Coffee 2013 and 2014.
- 15 The tripartite analysis is neither unique to me nor to Wollstonecraft. Lena Hall-denius (2007) uses the same terms as applied to Wollstonecraft although her analysis differs from mine. She also refers to independence as a relational ideal although she does not analyze this term in detail (2015, 28–9). Although I discuss the tripartite structure in Wollstonecraft's work, we also find it in many other writers of the period, including Catharine Macaulay and Richard Price (Coffee 2017, 2013).
- 16 Virtue is a complex and constantly changing concept. Although it may often have moralized and utopian or other-worldly connotations, all that is formally necessary for virtue is that a person behaves in ways that maintain the integrity and stability of the free republic. On my own account, all that is necessary for virtue is that people make use of public reason in their deliberations and respect the outcome, but I accept that richer notions are possible. See Coffee 2016 (in the context of Wollstonecraft) and 2017 (in the context of Macaulay).
- 17 "The rust of barbarity covers their proud masters and ruins them together. The poisoned breath of despotism destroys virtue in the bud" (in Bergès 2015, 111).
- 18 This is a point Wollstonecraft reinforces in her introduction to her *Vindication*, arguing that her "main argument" for the rights of women is that a dependent woman "will stop the progress of knowledge, for truth must be common to all, or it will be inefficacious with respect to its influence on general practice" (2014, 22).
- 19 [www.pensionspolicyinstitute.org.uk/pension-facts/pension-facts-tables/table-1-demographics](http://www.pensionspolicyinstitute.org.uk/pension-facts/pension-facts-tables/table-1-demographics) (accessed 31 July, 2017); [www.statista.com/statistics/457822/share-of-old-age-population-in-the-total-us-population/](http://www.statista.com/statistics/457822/share-of-old-age-population-in-the-total-us-population/) (accessed: 31 July, 2017).
- 20 See Coffee 2018 for a version of this argument developed by Frederick Douglass.
- 21 See Coffee 2014 on maternity rights and Wollstonecraft.
- 22 A great deal has been written on this subject. See Pateman (1990, 3–15) for a classic discussion and Hirschmann (2008, 1–28) for a more recent treatment. See also Coffee 2015, 52–6.
- 23 For a discussion of this problem in the context of Wollstonecraft, see Bergès 2011.
- 24 The more general question of republican circularity is beyond my scope, but I accept that it remains an issue for republicans.
- 25 In the very first paragraph of her introduction to the *Vindication*, Wollstonecraft identifies "the neglected education of my fellow creatures [as] the grand source of the[ir] misery," adding that "women in particular, are rendered weak and wretched by a variety of concurring causes [that originate in] a false system of education" (2014, 29).
- 26 "Men, in their youth, are prepared for professions, and marriage is not considered as the grand feature in their lives; whilst women, on the contrary, have no other scheme to sharpen their faculties" (2014, 87).



- 27 Macaulay's influence on Wollstonecraft in the development of her understanding of independence and the complex effect of socially dominating patriarchal structures is considerable. For an account see Coffee 2019).
- 28 If woman "be not prepared by education to become the companion of man, she will stop the progress of knowledge, for truth must be common to all, or it will be inefficacious with respect to its influence on general practice" (2014, 22).
- 29 Here she builds on the same argument made by Macaulay who concludes that it "proves man to be the slave of custom and of precept" (1790, 169). I discuss this in detail in Coffee 2013.

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## 8 Mary Wollstonecraft's Contribution to the "Invention of Autonomy"<sup>1</sup>

*Martina Reuter*

In his influential *The Invention of Autonomy*, J. B. Schneewind examines the Early Modern history of moral philosophy up until Immanuel Kant's categorical imperative. Schneewind emphasizes that "Kant invented the conception of morality as autonomy" (1998, 3), which means that he neither discovered a previously unknown form of morality nor merely formulated a final version of ideas developed by his predecessors. The novelty of Kant's invention consisted in his claim that we are autonomous because we ourselves legislate the moral law. In Schneewind's words, it is "only because of the legislative action of our own will that we are under moral law" (1998, 6). This conception of autonomy breaks with all previous understandings, according to which the moral law must have a foundation independent of our will, be it, for example, God's will, his intellect or some sentiments natural to human beings.

While emphasizing the inventive aspect of Kant's moral philosophy, Schneewind does also emphasize that we cannot understand Kant if we do not know the philosophical problems which he attempted to solve. This latter emphasis constitutes the rationale for his book. Schneewind traces the history of moral philosophy from the 17th century to Kant as a history of morality as self-governance, which gradually replaces earlier conceptions of morality as obedience. He emphasizes that the conceptions of morality as self-governance "reject the inequality of moral capacity among humans that was a standard part of conceptions of morality as obedience" (1998, 6). The modern development is thus guided by an egalitarian spirit questioning previous hierarchies.

Hierarchies of moral capacity were, as has been showed by recent decades of feminist research, most often gendered and the elements of obedience were often doubled in the case of women, who were required to obey external moral authorities as well as male authorities in their immediate social settings. Still, these gendered aspects of inequality and obedience are not present in Schneewind's story. This omission is puzzling; it should be evident that one cannot tell a comprehensive story about the invention of autonomous moral agency without considering whether agency has been affected by gender. But omitting women has not required much effort on



Schneewind's part. The authors he discusses rarely explicate aspects of gender and in the cases where this is done, such as by Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–78), Schneewind has chosen to consider Rousseau's conception as gender neutral and omit the rather problematic distinctions that Rousseau makes between the virtues of men and women.

Schneewind's story shows how the tendency to exclude the theoretical question of gender goes hand in hand with the exclusion of women thinkers. Though Schneewind gives a broad picture of the canon of moral philosophy, including such a thinker as the Marquis de Sade (1740–1814), he does not include relevant female moral philosophers, such as Catherine Macaulay (1731–91) or Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–97), who would have brought with them discussions of gender.<sup>2</sup>

My aim in this chapter is to discuss how Schneewind's interpretation of the invention of autonomy would look different if he had included a discussion of Wollstonecraft's moral philosophy. In addition to the obvious aspect of gender, I will discuss to what extent Wollstonecraft's combination of egalitarian and perfectionist tendencies challenges the opposition Schneewind posits between these two aspects of moral philosophy. I will do this by looking at the topic of education, which is largely overlooked by Schneewind. By focusing on both gender and questions of egalitarianism, perfectionism, and education, I want to illuminate how the inclusion or exclusion of gender is not "only about gender," but most often has consequences for a broad range of philosophical questions.

In the first section, I present some of the main features of Schneewind's interpretation and discuss how Wollstonecraft might fit in his context. In the second section, I examine Rousseau's and Wollstonecraft's views on how one can teach someone to think for her- or himself. This topic is crucially connected to the invention of autonomy, which requires independent moral decision making. In the third section, I discuss Wollstonecraft's views on knowledge and in particular the role she gives the generalization of particular observations. Her remarks on generalization are closely connected to her criticism of Rousseau's distinction between male and female knowledge, a distinction, which she claims deprives both men and women of the opportunity to be autonomous knowledge-seekers. In the final section, I return to Schneewind's interpretation and examine how including Wollstonecraft might have changed the picture. I conclude by briefly comparing Wollstonecraft's position on independent moral decision making with Kant's position and with some recent feminist criticisms of his position.

## Wollstonecraft in Schneewind's Context

Despite constituting a flagrant example of the persistent tendency even among egalitarian philosophers to exclude women thinkers and questions of gender from the history of philosophy,<sup>3</sup> Schneewind's account of the invention of autonomy has many virtues, which help us contextualize and



understand Wollstonecraft's moral philosophy. As has been pointed out by scholars, Wollstonecraft was very much concerned with the question of self-governance.<sup>4</sup> Schneewind's book illuminates philosophical topics that she shared with other thinkers as well as helps us capture differences and topics unique to her thought. He discusses two thinkers who particularly influenced her thought, Rousseau and Richard Price (1723–91), and his explicit emphasis on the importance of understanding theological as well as philosophical contexts is very helpful when it comes to understanding women thinkers, not least Wollstonecraft.<sup>5</sup> Schneewind structures his analysis by distinguishing between the theological traditions of intellectualism and voluntarism. According to voluntarism, God created morality by an act of his will and independently of any pre-existing standards, such as the laws of reason. This view makes morality profoundly dependent on God. According to intellectualism, morality is not created by God, but guided by his perfect knowledge of eternal standards. Though not the creator of morality, God is nonetheless essential because, as formulated by Schneewind, "his providential supervision ensures that we live in a morally ordered world" (Schneewind 1998, 8–9). In order to establish the principle of truly autonomous moral agency, Kant had to overcome both these traditions, which in their divergent ways made morality dependent on God.

The theological views of voluntarism and intellectualism are reflected in their proponents' views on moral psychology. Voluntarists (such as René Descartes) emphasize that the will is the foundation of human freedom and moral action whereas most intellectualists claim that human freedom and the capacity to act morally are ultimately based on the capacity of reason. Price and Wollstonecraft are paradigmatic examples of 18th-century intellectualism. They both hold that it is by their reason that humans are created in the image of God; that the capacity of reason makes humans free and capable of moral action; and they share a strong belief in providence.<sup>6</sup> It is more difficult to place Rousseau in relation to the intellectualism-voluntarism divide. With reference to Rousseau's belief in providence, Schneewind characterizes him as an antivoluntarist (1998, 482), but contrary to Price and Wollstonecraft, Rousseau holds that the will is an essential basis for human freedom and part of what makes humans God-like (Rousseau 1979, 280–81, see also Schneewind 1998, 475). In what follows I will show that the differences between Wollstonecraft's and Rousseau's views on the power of reason has profound consequences for their respective views on what it means to think for one self and particularly on how one can learn to do so.

Like many others, including Kant himself, Schneewind emphasizes Rousseau's profound influence on Kant's mature philosophy. Schneewind underlines the egalitarian aspects of modern moral philosophy and holds that Rousseau particularly taught Kant about the importance of "honoring the moral status of ordinary people" (1998, 488). According to Rousseau, Schneewind writes, "morality must be something we can each come



to know individually, by looking within ourselves, regardless of book learning" (1998, 491). Schneewind contrasts Rousseau's egalitarian conception with the "intellectualist morality of Leibniz and Wolff, in which Kant was raised" (1998, 489) and emphasizes that in order to reach his mature moral philosophy, Kant had to abandon the perfectionist strivings of his earlier influences. According to Schneewind, the perfectionism of intellectualist moral philosophers such as Leibniz and Wolff is problematic because it makes morality dependent on the educative role of the moral philosopher (1998, 489). A truly egalitarian morality cannot, according to his reading, posit a hierarchy between the moral capacity of the learned and the ordinary human being and neither can it make the development of the moral capacity of one person dependent on the capacity of somebody else.

Wollstonecraft was also profoundly influenced by Rousseau's egalitarian approach and she explicitly describes her own project as an attempt to extend Rousseau's opinion respecting men to include women. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, she points out that "it is a farce to call any being virtuous whose virtues do not result from the exercise of its own reason. This was Rousseau's opinion respecting men: I extend it to women" (Wollstonecraft 1989: 5, 90). But in the case of Wollstonecraft, egalitarianism does not, as I will argue, require a rejection of perfectionism.<sup>7</sup> Wollstonecraft's emphasis on everyone's equal moral capacity is profoundly connected to her emphasis on educating one's reason. In her case, "honoring the moral status of ordinary people" (Schneewind 1998, 488) requires that ordinary people are equally educated, and this requirement is consequently spelled out in her scheme for national co-educational day schools, where books are not abandoned, but where learning from practical experience plays an important role (Wollstonecraft 1989: 5, 229–50).

Wollstonecraft's egalitarianism is an egalitarianism of ability and of the right to develop one's ability.<sup>8</sup> It does not exclude individual distinction based on how well one achieves virtue. Right at the beginning of *Rights of Woman*, she writes that "the perfection of our nature and capacity of happiness, must be estimated by the degree of reason, virtue, and knowledge, that distinguish the individual," and she adds that it is equally undeniable that "from the exercise of reason, knowledge and virtue naturally flow [. . .] if mankind be viewed collectively" (Wollstonecraft 1989: 5, 81). Everyone has an ability to achieve virtue by exercising his or her reason, and everyone must be given equal opportunity to do so, but not everyone chooses the path of reason and virtue even when they have opportunity.

In the above quote, we see that Wollstonecraft posits a close parallel between knowledge and virtue, which are both grounded in the exercise of reason. From her point of view, one cannot achieve virtue without knowledge nor knowledge without the right kind of education, which must thus be equally available to all, regardless of gender. This view guides Wollstonecraft's argumentation in the *Rights of Woman*, and when, towards the end of the book, she describes her scheme for a national education, she writes



that “women must be allowed to found their virtue on knowledge, which is scarcely possible unless they be educated by the same pursuits as men” (1989: 5, 245). In what follows, I will particularly focus on the role of reasoning in Wollstonecraft’s conception of self-governance and argue that she adopts Rousseau’s radical egalitarianism while simultaneously developing it further by criticizing both his gendered conceptions and his rather pessimistic account of the power of reason.

### Reasoning for Oneself

Rousseau’s *Emile* investigates the paradoxical task of how to teach somebody to think for himself. The paradox is directly connected to Schneewind’s worry about the intellectualist’s dependence on a moral authority. Rousseau’s detailed discussions of education, mainly overlooked in Schneewind’s interpretation, can be seen exactly as an attempt to overcome reliance on authority while simultaneously realizing that moral agency is something that has to be learned. When describing the task facing the tutor of a pupil who has recently turned 12 and reached the age when reason has developed and needs to start getting exercised, Rousseau points out that “you should be well aware that it is rarely up to you to suggest to him what he ought to learn. It is up to him to desire it, to seek it, to find it. It is up to you to put it within his reach, skilfully to give birth to this desire and to furnish him with the means of satisfying it” (Rousseau 1979, 179). The aim is that “forced to learn by himself,” the pupil “uses his reason and not another’s; for to give nothing to opinion, one must give nothing to authority, and most of our errors come to us far less from ourselves than from others” (207). This aim and method are very much shared by Wollstonecraft and constitute the aspect of Rousseau’s thought that she wants to “extend [. . .] to women” (Wollstonecraft 1989: 5, 90). In *Rights of Woman*, she discusses the same pedagogical problems as Rousseau, and she likewise emphasizes that acquiring knowledge requires individual enterprise. Wollstonecraft writes:

The fact is, that men expect from education, what education cannot give. A sagacious parent or tutor may strengthen the body and sharpen the instruments by which the child is to gather knowledge; but the honey must be the reward of the individual’s own industry. It is almost as absurd to attempt to make a youth wise by the experience of another, as to expect the body to grow strong by the exercise which is only talked of, or seen.

(Wollstonecraft 1989: 5, 183)

Wollstonecraft contrasts her view with the dominant practice, where “instructors only instill certain notions into [the children’s] minds, that have no other foundation than their authority” (1989: 5, 183). In both Rousseau and Wollstonecraft, we find a very similar distinction between, on the one



hand, achieving true knowledge by the use of one's own efforts and, on the other hand, adopting opinions that have no other foundation than the authority of the person who presents them.<sup>9</sup> It is particularly interesting that Wollstonecraft refers explicitly to notions that have no other *foundation* than authority. She is not only considering the pedagogical question about how knowledge can be achieved, but also the epistemological question about the justification of knowledge. Wollstonecraft claims that only knowledge based on the exercise of one's own mental faculties, including both sensation and reason, can be justified. External authority is not a legitimate foundation of knowledge.

In order to learn to think for oneself one needs personal experience and the right kind of motivation. Exercising and strengthening one's mental capacities requires effort, just as exercising one's bodily capacities, and the using of effort requires motivation. Wollstonecraft, interestingly, emphasizes that this motivation has to be internal. She writes that "we never do any thing well, unless we love it for its own sake" (Wollstonecraft 1989: 5, 188). Rousseau and Wollstonecraft both think that one must desire knowledge for its own sake—not in order to achieve the glory of being learned, for example—but their understandings of how this desire can be built up are partly different. Whereas Rousseau gives the tutor a strict guiding role and rejects the use of books in education,<sup>10</sup> Wollstonecraft presents a more liberal view, emphasizing that pupils must, at least to some extent, be allowed to follow their own interests and natural inclinations. Her view includes a more liberal attitude towards books and an appreciation of the motivational role of fiction.

In the last chapter of *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft gives the example of a sagacious man, in charge of the education of his daughter and niece, two girls with different educational backgrounds and, presumably, different abilities. She writes:

The niece, who had considerable abilities, had, before she was left to his guardianship, been indulged in desultory reading. Her he endeavoured to lead, and did lead to history and moral essays; but his daughter, whom a fond weak mother had indulged, and who consequently was averse to every thing like application, he allowed to read novels: and used to justify his conduct by saying, that if she ever attained a relish for reading them, he should have some foundation to work upon; and that erroneous opinions were better than none at all.

(Wollstonecraft 1989: 5, 257)

The question of motivation is particularly acute in the case of the daughter, who is described as "averse to every thing like application." In her case, reading novels can be an appropriate way of motivating her to apply her mind. Wollstonecraft can allow this liberal attitude since she holds the perhaps slightly surprising attitude that "erroneous opinions [are] better than



none at all.” We find this attitude expressed in many other passages as well, for example, when she argues that “the regulation of the passions is not, always, wisdom” (Wollstonecraft 1989: 5, 179). Here, she writes that

one reason why men have superior judgment, and more fortitude than women, is undoubtedly this, that they give a freer scope to the grand passions, and by more frequently going astray enlarge their minds. If then by the exercise of their own reason they fix on some stable principle, they have probably to thank the force of their passions, nourished by *false* views of life, and permitted to overleap the boundary that secures content.

(Wollstonecraft 1989: 5, 179)

Wollstonecraft can make allowances for false opinions, because she has an optimistic view of the ability of reason to evaluate our acquired opinions and ultimately to judge whether they are true or false. Here we find a clear difference between Wollstonecraft’s and Rousseau’s views. He holds a pessimistic view on reason’s ability to uproot false opinions once they have taken hold of the mind, and, therefore, he puts much more emphasis on protecting the pupil from acquiring false opinions in the first place, either by distorted experiences or by reading books.<sup>11</sup>

Again, in the two above passages, we see an emphasis on the exercise of one’s own reason and on the need for personal experience, which reason can work upon, regardless of whether this experience produces true or false opinions. In the last passage, Wollstonecraft emphasizes that it is by evaluating the truth or falseness of our views that we can ultimately reach stable and thus universal principles. In order to have a more detailed picture of how Wollstonecraft understands the relation between reason and experience we have to ask the question of how we should place her in relation to the empiricism of her time. This question has relevance also for how we should understand her position in relation to the story told by Schneewind, because he holds that “[e]mpiricism from Bacon through Locke had a strong affinity with voluntarism in ethics” (1998, 10). Wollstonecraft’s moral thinking is firmly anchored in the intellectualist tradition and if it can be shown that she combines intellectualism with an empiricist epistemology, she would be an example questioning Schneewind’s distinction.

## Impressions and Generalization

Some scholars have claimed that Wollstonecraft’s epistemology relies on John Locke’s empiricism (Todd 2000, 76), but Natalie Taylor has challenged this interpretation and argued that Wollstonecraft in fact differs radically from Locke by holding that the principles of truth are innate (2007, 90–108). Defenders of a Lockean interpretation and Taylor both refer to Wollstonecraft’s first published work *Thoughts on the Education*



of *Daughters* (1787), where she encourages parents “to follow Mr. Locke’s system,” but then two paragraphs later surprisingly points out that it is, in her opinion, “a well proved fact, that principles of truth are innate” (Wollstonecraft 1989: 4, 9). Taylor is right in pointing out that the epistemology of *Thoughts* is not Locke’s and neither is it Wollstonecraft’s intention to claim so. When referring to Locke’s system, she is referring to his philosophy of education and its emphasis on reason rather than arbitrary power and obedience, not to his empiricist epistemology.<sup>12</sup>

Still, I want to argue that Taylor is taking her interpretation of Wollstonecraft’s epistemology too far in the direction of innateness. *Thoughts* is to my knowledge the only place where Wollstonecraft refers approvingly to innate principles of morality and the evidence for an epistemology of innate ideas, which Taylor claims to find in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* is not convincing.<sup>13</sup> Between writing *Thoughts* and *Rights of Woman* Wollstonecraft read both Rousseau’s *Emile* and Catherine Macaulay’s *Letters on Education* (1790), which she reviewed for the *Analytical Review*. Macaulay argues explicitly against a morality built on innate principles. She writes that

[R]eason is always able to discern the moral difference of things, whenever they are fairly and plainly proposed; which, as I take it, establishes an immutable and abstract fitness in a more satisfactory manner than what is called a moral consciousness from innate principles.

(Macaulay 1996, 193–194)

In her review, Wollstonecraft refers approvingly to Macaulay’s claim that “morals must be taught on immutable principles” (Wollstonecraft 1989: 7, 314) and the idea of immutable moral principles, which are the same for men and women, plays an important role in *Rights of Woman*, not least in Wollstonecraft’s criticism of Rousseau’s idea about different standards for male and female perfectibility.<sup>14</sup> But in this mature work, Wollstonecraft seems to agree with Macaulay that immutable principles are known through abstraction and generalization. They are not innate.

Wollstonecraft’s empiricist influences are most evident in a short chapter in the *Rights of Woman* where she discusses the early association of ideas and their effect on character. Here she describes the strong formative power of habitual association of ideas, which “has a great effect on the moral character of mankind; and by which a turn is given to the mind that commonly remains throughout life” (Wollstonecraft 1989: 5, 186). In this chapter, Wollstonecraft is not primarily interested in how impressions, ideas and associations contribute to knowledge, but rather in how they affect the female character. She argues that if women appear defective in their knowledge and conduct, this is not because of their innate nature, but because of an inadequate upbringing immersing them with impressions without strengthening reason in order to examine these impressions. She writes:



Every thing that they see or hear serves to fix impressions, call forth emotions, and associate ideas, that give a sexual character to the mind. False notions of beauty and delicacy stop the growth of their limbs and produce a sickly soreness, rather than delicacy of organs; and thus weakened by being employed in unfolding instead of examining the first associations, forced on them by every surrounding object, how can they attain the vigour necessary to enable them to throw off that factitious character?

(Wollstonecraft 1989: 5, 186)

Again, we find a strong parallel between the formation of the mind and body, but whereas Wollstonecraft compared the strengthening of reason with the strengthening of body in the passages cited in the previous part, here we see what happens when body and reason are both weakened. The female mind is weakened because it is employed in passively unfolding associations, which are forced on it by surrounding objects, instead of actively learning to examine these associations. Wollstonecraft distinguishes between the passive capacities of receiving impressions and associations and the active capacity of reason. Passive impulses such as passions and impressions are useful and even necessary in order to activate reason, but if reason is not actively employed in examining these impulses, as Wollstonecraft argues is the case with most women, then the impulses deform the passively receptive mind and thus one's character.

Wollstonecraft's emphasis on the active capacity of reason distinguishes her view from Rousseau's view of reason as a derivative and largely instrumental faculty, which develops in order to satisfy our desires rather than in order to control them (Rousseau 2002, 97). He argues that up until the age of 12, the child lacks reason, and, therefore, impressions need to be regulated from the outside, by attentive parents and tutors (1979, 89–93). Following Locke rather than Rousseau, Wollstonecraft seems to be more optimistic considering the possibility to activate reason already in quite small children.<sup>15</sup> In the last paragraph of the chapter on early impressions, she writes:

If such be the force of habit; if such be the bondage of folly, how carefully ought we to guard the mind from storing up vicious associations; and equally careful should we be to cultivate the understanding, to save the poor wight from the weak dependent state of even harmless ignorance.

(Wollstonecraft 1989: 5, 190)

Wollstonecraft is acutely aware of the force of habits that are difficult to change later in life, and she emphasizes the need to guard the mind, but guardianship consists in cultivating the understanding rather than in appointing an external guardian, such as Emile's tutor. She does not mention



Rousseau here, but the idea of a “weak dependent state of even harmless ignorance” is clearly pointed at his—and many other educators’—wish to protect women from harmful impressions, hoping to leave them innocent, but in fact making them ignorant.

When Wollstonecraft describes the activity of reason, she most often refers to the “power of [. . .] discerning truth” and the “power of generalizing ideas” (1989: 5, 122, 123), which seems to be used synonymously. Humans discern the truth by generalizing ideas, which is further described as “drawing comprehensive conclusions from individual observations” (123). In another passage, where Wollstonecraft emphasizes that women need to exercise their understanding in order to achieve virtue, she points out that the head must be “furnished with ideas, and set to work to compare them, in order to acquire judgment, by generalizing simple ones” (198). Wollstonecraft’s emphasis on generalizing from individual observations and simple ideas clearly places her in an empiricist framework, where experience constitutes a necessary aspect of knowledge.

Experience is necessary, but Wollstonecraft does emphasize that it is the generalization of ideas that “really deserves the name of knowledge” (Wollstonecraft 1989: 5, 123). This claim is closely connected to her criticism of Rousseau’s idea of the complementary union of husband and wife, man and woman. In the very passage where she criticizes his view of woman as a “fanciful kind of *half* being,” she writes:

I still insist, that not only the virtue, but the *knowledge* of the two sexes should be the same in nature, if not in degree, and that women, considered not only as moral, but rational creatures, ought to endeavour to acquire human virtues (or perfections) by the *same* means as men, instead of being educated like a fanciful kind of *half* being—one of Rousseau’s wild chimeras.

(Wollstonecraft 1989: 5, 108)

In *Emile*, Rousseau claims that “the most complete science” is achieved when men and women search for knowledge together. He writes:

The quest for abstract and speculative truths, principles, and axioms in the sciences, for everything that tends to generalize ideas, is not within the competence of women. All their studies ought to be related to practice. It is for them to apply the principles man has found, and to make the observations which lead man to the establishment of principles. [. . .] Woman observes, and man reasons. From this conjunction results the clearest insight and the most complete science regarding itself that the human mind can acquire—in a word, the surest knowledge of oneself and others available to our species.

(Rousseau 1979, 386–7)



It is easy to see that from Wollstonecraft's point of view, with her emphasis on the generalization of ideas as the only kind of true knowledge, Rousseau does indeed condemn women to ignorance, when allowing them only the role of making observations. But Rousseau's view is not flawed only because of its effects on women. It is based on a misguided understanding of knowledge, where observation and generalization are conceived of as separate forms of knowledge rather than as two necessary components of knowledge. Achieving such knowledge is a holistic and individual enterprise, which requires observation, experience, and opinions as well as reason, which is strengthened by examining the truth and falsity of ideas.

There seems to be a contradiction between Rousseau's description of Emile's education, which teaches him to observe as well as generalize, and his description of knowledge achieved by man and woman together. Perceived from this point of view, Wollstonecraft is pointing at the contradiction between Rousseau's education of Emile to become a self-governing man and citizen and his view of the conjunctive union based on mutual dependence. The contradiction becomes particularly visible when we look at the realm of knowledge, because whereas the idea of complementary male and female virtues is as such quite conceivable, the idea of splitting knowledge between two minds is much less so. Wollstonecraft shows that Rousseau's description of complementary male and female knowledge is not only condemning women to ignorance, it is also denying men the role of equal, independent, and self-governing knowledge-seekers.

### Reconsidering the Invention of Autonomy

It is not easy to pinpoint exactly where Wollstonecraft's views on impressions, generalization, and discernment place her in relation to empiricism and its criticism of innateness. The terminology of "discerning truth" is particularly tricky, because it is used by critics of innate principles, such as Macaulay, as well as by Richard Price, in his Platonist criticism of Locke's empiricist understanding of the origin of ideas. In his *Review of the Principal Questions in Morals*, Price is primarily interested in criticizing Hutcheson's moral sense theory and in order to show that reason rather than sense is the foundation of morality, he argues that we cannot arrive at general ideas by sensation and reflection alone. Following a classical Platonist argument, he asks: "Thus; from any *particular* idea of a triangle, it is said we can frame the *general* one; but does not the very reflexion said to be necessary to this, on a greater or lesser triangle, imply, that the general idea is already in the mind?" (Price 1787, 37).

Wollstonecraft's discussion of generalization—a term not used by Price—seems to contradict his view and take her in the direction of empiricism, but a comparison between their views is further complicated by the fact that Price distinguishes between ontological primacy and primacy in time. He points out that though the understanding "is the most important source of our



ideas," it is "not first in time" (1787, 49). When we learn to know the general idea of a triangle, the general idea is temporally preceded by sensory ideas of particular triangles. Wollstonecraft is primarily interested in the temporal process of learning or achieving knowledge and she refers to this process as a process of generalization. The question of whether generalization is based only on reflection (as Locke claims) or whether it is ontologically dependent on innate general ideas (as Price claims) is not at the center of her concern. Though I disagree with Natalie Taylor and do not think that Wollstonecraft defends an epistemology based on innate principles in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, I do not find any clear argument against innateness either. When compared to Schneewind's distinction between voluntarist empiricists and intellectualist rationalists, Wollstonecraft can be seen as blurring the divide between empiricism and rationalism, but perhaps not so explicitly that she can be used as a case in order to question his distinction.<sup>16</sup>

When looking at Wollstonecraft's contribution to the invention of autonomy, the question of education comes to the fore. From her perspective, egalitarianism is inseparable from education that provides equal opportunity, and this perspective does stir the focus of Schneewind's story, which places education at the margin of concerns. Schneewind's exclusion of education is connected to the exclusion of women thinkers: Treatises on education were a genre harboring female authors and providing them with opportunities to develop their philosophical thought. Including a woman or two would almost inevitably have introduced educational topics. In addition, views on education were most often gendered and advocating either different or similar educations for girls and boys. Towards the end of the 18th century, education was a deeply contested topic, not least from a gender perspective, and this aspect is absent in Schneewind's interpretation.

Though the topics of gender and education are closely connected, the exclusion of women is not the only problem related to Schneewind's exclusion of education. The exclusion affects also his interpretation of Rousseau, one of his main authors, and even of Rousseau's decisive influence on Kant. Schneewind does briefly mention the educational setting of *Emile* and the problems connected to the tutor's authority (1998, 478), but when he records how Rousseau taught Kant to honor the moral status of ordinary people, he excludes the aspect of education even when it is mentioned by Kant himself. In one of his *Notes*, Kant writes that "One must teach the young to honour the common understanding from moral as well as logical grounds" (Schneewind 1998, 488). When interpreting this remark, Schneewind focuses on honoring the common understanding and omits the fact that according to Kant, this is something that one has to learn.

Schneewind's interpretation of the invention of autonomy is based on careful readings of numerous 17th- and 18th-century texts, but his interpretation is guided by its endpoint, Kant's mature concept of autonomy. This is a conscious choice on Schneewind's part and he is aware that it "skews [his] selection of philosophers and topics for presentation" (1998, 6), but



it seems to have had unintended consequences as well. Kant's categorical imperative is non-temporal and does not rely on any process of moral development. By taking it as his starting point, Schneewind seems to end up excluding temporal processes such as education and moral development from his exposition of the history of self-governance, even in cases when these processes are clearly there in the texts. The exclusion of moral education is connected to and mutually strengthening the opposition that Schneewind perceives between egalitarianism and perfectionism: For him, egalitarianism is independent of moral development. We can now see that the role of education in the history of moral self-governance is a topic where the exclusion of women and gender goes hand in hand with a more general bias of interpretation. It would have been possible for Schneewind to include a discussion of education without including women authors and discussions of gender, but in that case their exclusion would have been even more flagrant than it is now. Likewise, it would have been possible to include some women authors without including the topic of education, but in that case its exclusion would have required a very selective reading of their writings.

Wollstonecraft's concept of autonomy is not Kantian. Schneewind's description of Price's and Thomas Reid's (1710–96) position is true of her as well: "Even if we need neither outside instruction nor outside motivation, our moral knowledge is knowledge of an order independent of us. [...] We are self-governing, for these thinkers, but not autonomous" (1998, 514).<sup>17</sup> Though Kant's contemporary, Wollstonecraft's moral philosophy is pre-Kantian and firmly anchored in the intellectualist tradition.<sup>18</sup> Kant's moral philosophy has benefits when compared to this tradition, particularly because it makes moral decision making independent of a pre-established order, but it does also have its problems. I will conclude by comparing my interpretation of Wollstonecraft's potential criticism of Kant's moral philosophy with more recent feminist criticisms.

Had she engaged with Kant's philosophy, Wollstonecraft would have criticized his sexist claims about women's inferior intellectual and moral capacities just as fiercely as she criticized Rousseau's views about complementary knowledge and morality,<sup>19</sup> but it is less clear that she would have questioned Kant's ideal of autonomy on feminist grounds (though she might have done so on theological grounds). Rather, she may have treated it as she treated many of Rousseau's views: extending it to women. More recent feminists have criticized Kant's moral philosophy in general and his concept of autonomy in particular for what is claimed to be an exclusion of the interdependence of human relations and the perspective of care.<sup>20</sup> Jean P. Rumsey, for example, argues that Kant's ideal of independence reflect the experience of a man of his time and is "damaged by his exclusion of women's experience" (1997, 130). This claim becomes problematic if Wollstonecraft's writings are seen as the testimony of the experience of a woman of Kant's times. Wollstonecraft's emphasis on independence is at least as strong as Kant's, who according to Ramsey holds "that the strongest passion in the heart of *man* is for independence" (Rumsey 1997, 126).<sup>21</sup>



Wollstonecraft was profoundly aware of the interdependence of human relations and she emphasizes that “the care of children in their infancy is one of the grand duties annexed to the female character by nature” (1989: 5, 222), but these relations of care are not opposed to the independence of mind, quite the contrary.<sup>22</sup> Wollstonecraft continues: “To be a good mother—a woman must have sense, and that independence of mind which few women possess who are taught to depend on their husbands” (222–23). Wollstonecraft is much more aware than Kant of the particular demands of interdependent relations, and, contrary to Kant, she recognizes the moral significance of “generous feeling” (181),<sup>23</sup> but like Kant, she holds that morality is ultimately based on the independent use of reason.

From a Wollstonecraftian perspective, the main feminist problem with Kant's concept of autonomy is his assumption of equal accessibility.<sup>24</sup> As emphasized by Schneewind, Kant holds that the categorical imperative is equally accessible to all reasoning beings. In the preface to *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant writes that “in moral matters human reason can easily be brought to a high degree of correctness and accomplishment, even in the most common understanding” (1998, 5). Like Wollstonecraft, Kant is aware that dependence and servitude destroy the independence required for moral agency.<sup>25</sup> He is also aware that common human understanding needs “instruction regarding the source of its principle and the correct determination of this principle” (1998, 18), but he is much less concerned than she about how dependence can be overturned and how instruction can be given in a truly emancipatory manner.

Wollstonecraft's most lasting contribution to the invention of autonomy, I claim, is her persistent emphasis on equal education. Like Rousseau, she is intently aware of the paradox of teaching how to think for oneself and contrary to Rousseau, who gives the tutor unlimited authority, even if his authority is intended to be overcome, Wollstonecraft puts much emphasis on the question of developing internal motivation and on the need to seek knowledge and virtue for their own sake. Contrary to Kant, Wollstonecraft does not think that our internal motivation to act morally can be based purely on reason. The passions play an important role. For Wollstonecraft, in order to establish an egalitarian moral philosophy, it is not enough to be “honouring the moral status of ordinary people” (Schneewind 1998, 488). Moral autonomy cannot be only assumed, it has to be continually established both by fighting unequal relations of dependence and by equalizing accessibility by truly emancipatory methods of education.

## Notes

- 1 Earlier versions of this chapter have been presented at Yeditepe University (Istanbul), Università del Piemonte Orientale (Vercelli), and Uppsala University. I thank the organisers of these events for the opportunity and the audiences for their helpful comments. Special thanks to Sandrine Bergès, Alberto Siani, Marguerite Deslauriers, and Erika Ruonakoski.



- 2 There is a wide range of 17th- and 18th-century women philosophers who deserve to be included in a history of the invention of autonomy. Lisa Shapiro has recently shown how the little known French thinker Gabrielle Suchon (1632–1703) can be situated on the path traced by Schneewind, see Shapiro 2017.
- 3 Research on implicit biases has indicated that people who hold explicit and sincere egalitarian views may simultaneously hold implicit biases, which affect their evaluation of the performances of members of disadvantaged or marginalized groups, such as women or ethnic minorities. It has also been shown that people tend to overestimate their own objectivity. Philosophers, who often identify themselves as egalitarian and objective persons may thus be subjects to implicit biases, which they have difficulties to identify and correct. This is true for philosophers of both genders. For a detailed discussion of the effects of implicit biases in the realm of academic philosophy, see Saul 2013. The effects of implicit biases on interpretations of the history of philosophy has not been studied, but it is plausible to think that one can find the same kinds of mechanisms at work when a historian of philosophy evaluates the importance of a particular philosopher as when one evaluates the importance of an article submission or a CV.
- 4 Wollstonecraft's views on self-governance and their roots in the rational dissent of James Burgh (1714–75), Price, and Joseph Priestly (1733–1804) was first discussed by Barker-Benfield 1989. The first explicitly feminist discussion of Wollstonecraft's views on self-governance were developed by Catriona Mackenzie (1993), who has also discussed Wollstonecraft's views in the context of contemporary 21st-century relational autonomy (Mackenzie 2016).
- 5 On the importance of taking Wollstonecraft's theological views seriously, see Taylor 2003, Botting 2006, Taylor 2007, O'Brien 2009, Reuter 2010 and 2016, and Abbey 2014.
- 6 I compare Price's and Wollstonecraft's views on providence in Reuter 2010.
- 7 On Wollstonecraft's perfectionism as opposed to Rousseau's views on perfectibility, see also Reuter 2014 and 2017.
- 8 On Wollstonecraft's emphasis on women's right to develop their abilities, see Halldenius 2007 and 2015.
- 9 We can also note that Rousseau and Wollstonecraft are early proponents of what is today called pedagogical constructionism: Knowledge cannot be transferred from one mind to another; it has to be (re)constructed by the learner and based on personal experience.
- 10 In *Emile*, Rousseau claims that "The child who reads does not think, he only reads" (1979, 168). Books can be allowed only when they are necessary and Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* is the only book Rousseau finds necessary for the education of Emile. For an excellent discussion of why *Robinson Crusoe* is necessary, see Schaeffer 2002. I discuss Rousseau's and Wollstonecraft's views on books in relation to their views on the imagination in Reuter 2017.
- 11 See, for example, Rousseau 1979, 401. I give a more detailed account of the differences between Wollstonecraft's and Rousseau's views on reason and its relation to the passions and the imagination in Reuter 2017.
- 12 She writes: "To be able to follow Mr Locke's system (and this may be said of almost all treatises on education) the parents must have subdued their own passions, which is not often the case in any considerable degree" (Wollstonecraft 1989: 4, 9).
- 13 In *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft refers to innate ideas only in a mocking context, as "a rant about innate elegance" (1989: 5, 97). The second quote from the *Rights of Woman* that Taylor uses as evidence for her interpretation, "that soul be stamped with the heavenly image" (1989: 5, 122), does not imply that



there are innate principles or ideas, but rather that the human soul is created in the image of God, a very widely held theological assumption.

- 14 See Reuter 2014 for a detailed discussion of Wollstonecraft's criticism of Rousseau.
- 15 For Locke's position, see Locke 1964, 65.
- 16 It is interesting to ask whether Macaulay challenges the distinction. Her theological and moral views are clearly intellectualist, but if Karen Green's interpretation is correct, her epistemology is Lockean (Green 2014, 179).
- 17 Wollstonecraft's emphasis on the independence involved in self-governance is at least as far ranging as in the authors discussed by Schneewind. In *Rights of Woman* she emphasizes that "it is the right use of reason alone which makes us independent of every thing—excepting the unclouded Reason—'Whose service is perfect freedom'" (1989: 5, 190), and that "it would seem that the virtues of man are not limited by the Being who alone could limit them; and that he may press forward without considering whether he steps out of his sphere by indulging such a noble ambition" (1989: 5, 116).
- 18 There has been some discussion of Wollstonecraft's connection to Kant. In her widely read introduction to feminist thought, Rosemarie Tong points at similarities between Kant's and Wollstonecraft's views on the rational agent as an end in itself (1989, 16), and Sandrine Bergès has discussed similarities between Wollstonecraft's emphasis, in *Rights of Woman*, "that women's equal rationality makes it the duty of a nation to educate them" (Bergès 2013, 36) and Kant's argument in "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?" (Kant 1996). We know that Wollstonecraft had some familiarity with Kant's thought, she makes a critical remark on his distinction between the sublime and the beautiful in one of her *Hints* (1989: 5, 275), but there is no evidence that she read any of his works. From 1787 onwards many British journals of liberal and radical leanings discussed Kant and published abridgments of German reviews of his work. The *Analytical Review*, for example, with which Wollstonecraft was affiliated, published abridged translations of reviews of *Religion* (in 1794), *Zum ewigen Frieden* (in 1796) and *Rechtslehre* (in 1797) originally published in *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung*, with which the *Analytical Review* was linked. In his detailed study of the early British reception of Kant's philosophy, Giuseppe Micheli argues that like many other works published on the continent, Kant's works were known "more through the reviews published in the journals than by direct reading of the texts" (1990, 206). It is most likely that this is true also for Wollstonecraft's familiarity with Kant. The abridged reviews were adapted for a British readership and, according to Micheli, the review of *Zum ewigen Frieden*, for example, emphasized "the thesis of the necessity which should govern the historical process in the direction of peace and the idea that the time was already ripe for a radical change in the history of humanity" (1990, 234). This emphasis interestingly resembles Richard Price's providentialist view on human improvement (Price 1991, 195–6). Wollstonecraft may very well have read especially the latter two reviews (in 1794 she was in France), but we must note that they were published well after she wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, and it seems futile to look for Kantian influences in that work. Similarities must rather be seen as due to Kant's and Wollstonecraft's independent interpretations of essential Enlightenment ideas.
- 19 Kant's views on women were also influenced by Rousseau. In *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime*, he writes, for example, that "the man should become more perfect as a man, and the woman as a wife," cited in Rumsey 1997, 131.
- 20 See Schott 1997 for an overview of some of these criticisms.



- 21 On the essential role of independence in Wollstonecraft's thought, see Halldenius 2013 and 2015, and Coffee 2014.
- 22 See Bergès 2016 for a discussion about Wollstonecraft's views on wet-nursing in the context of her republicanism.
- 23 See Reuter 2016 for a discussion of the role of the passions in Wollstonecraft's notion of virtue.
- 24 Interestingly, Shapiro draws a similar conclusion when she analyzes Suchon's contribution to the invention of autonomy. Shapiro emphasizes that for Suchon, it is not enough to conclude that freedom, knowledge and moral authority are natural human capacities, one also needs to address what there is "to be done to ensure that [women] can exercise these capacities" (2017, 61).
- 25 For discussions of Kant's views on dependence and how it destroys morality, see Schneewind 1998, 488–9, 511.

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# 9 No Justice Without Autonomy!

## Olympe de Gouges and Susan Moller Okin

*Alberto L. Siani (Università di Pisa)*<sup>1</sup>

### 1. Introduction: Neutrality, Autonomy, Gender

Whereas classical depictions of justice present us with a female deity, many feminist philosophers lament that most theories of justice are tailored for men. This bias can be explicit in many classical theories, or implicit in most contemporary ones, especially in the liberal ones, with which my paper deals. Most liberal theories of justice hold that individuals are free and equal independently of the conception of the good they hold and of their particular identity. This is the so-called liberal principle of neutrality: “No reason is a good reason if it requires the power holder to assert: (a) that his conception of the good is better than that asserted by any of his fellow citizens, or (b) that, regardless of his conception of the good, he is intrinsically superior to one or more of his fellow citizens” (Ackermann 1980, 11). Accordingly, the principles of justice are not grounded in an independently existing conception of the good (e.g. one dictated by religion), nor are they valid on the basis of the identity of whoever asserts them. Rather, they are the product of a (virtual) voluntary decision by free and equal individuals. Such individuals are thought of as autonomous, in the precise etymological sense that they legislate over themselves. That a liberal conception of justice is premised on the autonomy of the citizens is very clear, for instance, in Rawls’s idea of justice as fairness:

A society satisfying the principles of justice as fairness comes as close as a society can to being a voluntary scheme, for it meets the principles which free and equal persons would assent to under circumstances that are fair. In this sense its members are autonomous and the obligations they recognize self-imposed.

(Rawls 1971, 13)

Liberal conceptions of justice, together with the underlying assumptions of the neutrality and autonomy of the subject, have been criticized from different point of views. One obvious possible critique is that since the real world is populated by vulnerable individuals made of flesh and blood and



not by neutral atomistic philosophical abstractions, such conceptions may ignore or, worse, actively conceal differences producing actual inequality.<sup>2</sup> According to a common feminist critique, the supposed neutrality of the autonomous individual subject in liberal theories of justice results, because of gender-based assumptions, in paradox and injustice.<sup>3</sup> Philosophical reflections on justice claim to apply to every subject equally, but in fact this autonomous neutral subject is only the projection of the subjectivity of male family heads, for whom e.g. the transition from the public sphere to the private one and back is a matter of free individual choice, which is mostly not the case from the perspective of women within fairly traditional households. Clearly, this critique pinpoints a broader issue within the liberal tradition, which already Marx had recognized in *The Jewish Question*, and can apply, besides issues of gender, to issues of socio-economic inequality, race, etc. In its broadest form, this critique can be extended, beyond the domestic scene, also to international justice, and most notably to the debates on the universalism of human rights, criticized as “Western” rights, which claim to be neutrally valid for every subject, but are actually imposed on the rest of the world disregarding non-Western values and conceptions of the human being.<sup>4</sup>

In order to address this core critique, one might resort, broadly speaking, to two different strategies. First of all, one might challenge the idea of a neutral autonomous subject as a groundwork for justice as intrinsically discriminatory and non-inclusive of certain groups of subjects, and appeal instead, e.g. in a perfectionist sense, to a shared idea of the common good. Following this model, individual autonomy is not conceived as a good *per se*, but, if anything, as a mean conducive to that common good.<sup>5</sup> On the second option, one might keep the full import of individual autonomy and the neutrality principle, while applying some conceptual and practical provisions to be specified with the aim of removing or limiting socially originated biases and extending the scope and the actuality of liberal justice.<sup>6</sup>

My aim in this chapter is to sketch, in a simplified way given the space constraints, two possible paradigms representing these two strategies of reform of the liberal conception in consideration of the feminist critique. To this aim, I turn to two women philosophers from different times, both of them acting as a significant counterbalance to two significant moments of the history and the theory of liberalism, whose theories however do not imply—at least explicitly—a wholesale rejection of the liberal approach. The two philosophers are Olympe de Gouges and Susan Moller Okin, and the two moments are, respectively, the French-revolutionary republicanism and John Rawls’s theory of justice as fairness. In order to clarify the structure of the paper, I will here briefly anticipate the main lines of my interpretation.

Both authors criticize the dichotomy between the allegedly neutral universalism of liberal theories and their actual non-inclusive, or explicitly exclusionary, character toward women (and not only),<sup>7</sup> but they pursue this



criticism in different ways. De Gouges, while at times presenting women as independent and autonomous, ultimately does not have autonomy as her goal, but rather social cohesion, as well as individual and collective morality and happiness. Faced with the fundamental ambiguities of the non-inclusive universalism of the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*, she adopts herself an ambiguous position, oscillating between “invocation of stereotypes of femininity and of claims to equality which deny those stereotypes.” (Wallach Scott 1989, 9) As I will argue, such ambiguities are avoided (and thus the claim for equality made stronger, both theoretically and practically) by Okin. While holding tight to the idea of a neutral autonomous subject as the basis of justice, Okin shows that the simple assumption of this subject in liberal theories of justice hides the profound inequality stemming from gendered social relationships with regard to the conditions for that individual autonomy. Thus, rather than criticizing the idea altogether as intrinsically non-inclusive, she looks for ways to make it inclusive.

In contrasting the two authors, I will not attempt to offer a historically contextual analysis of these approaches, except for a few points. This clarification is necessary as I am dealing with two very different authors from different times and contexts, with no direct connection to each other, and writing in very different styles. I will not consider such aspects, insofar as I am only interested in these two philosophers as two different ideal-typical approaches to the issue of liberalism and gender.

## 2. Olympe de Gouges

### 2.1 *The Rights of Woman Between Cosmic Harmony and Men's Tyranny*

The text by Olympe de Gouges to be analyzed here was written in the context of the French Revolution. The National Constituent Assembly adopted the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*<sup>8</sup> in 1789. Despite being a seminal moment in the history of human and civil rights, the DRM did not include women (along with slaves, children, and other groups), who were considered merely passive citizens and thus denied the rights it envisaged. The failed recognition of women's rights in the French Revolution prompted de Gouges to publish the *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen* in 1791. Only two years later, in 1793, de Gouges was guillotined by the Jacobins with the charge of attacking the Revolutionary government and attempting to reinstate the monarchy.

The text commonly referred to as *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen* is actually a patchwork of different texts (the actual “Declaration” being but one of them), following different registers and having different aims (see de Gouges 1791).<sup>9</sup> Although I will not be dealing with all of them, it is useful to at least briefly introduce them. The DRW opens with an appeal to the Queen, to whom the document is addressed.



There follows a short, passionate invocation to men: *The Rights of Woman*, containing an attack on the cosmic injustice of the inequality between sexes. We then have the Declaration, modeled, partly with a parodistic intent, on the structure of the DRM, with a Preamble followed by seventeen articles. Afterwards we find a Postscript lamenting the condition of women especially in the context of marriage and family, resulting in a *Frame for a social Contract between Man and Woman* that acts like a “form” for a marriage based on equality.<sup>10</sup> The *Frame* is followed by a passionate plea for the men of color in the colonies with an attack on colonists, and by an account of de Gouges’s own vicissitudes while traveling from the countryside to her printer (aiming at bearing a witness to the conditions of lawlessness in the country). The document is concluded by another short Postscript concerning the writing and publication process and celebrating the king’s acceptance of the Constitution and the National Assembly’s proclamation of a general amnesty.

As should be clear, the document does not aim to offer a full-fledged theory of sexual difference in politics and society: It is, rather, a political-polemical pamphlet with satirical hints.<sup>11</sup> It is my claim, however, that its critical intention is informed by the employment of a natural rights based approach to address issues of equality among sexes, guided by a perfectionist understanding of individual and collective morality. To begin with, the text appeals to the Queen with the double aim of defending the rights of women and of trying to mediate between the monarchy and the revolutionaries: “This revolution will only be complete when all women are aware of their deplorable fate and of the rights that they have lost in society.” Then, de Gouges appeals to men themselves: “Man, are you capable of being fair [*juste*]? [. . .] What gave you the sovereign right to oppress my sex? [. . .] Observe the creator in his wisdom, examine nature in all its grandeur for you seem to wish to get closer to it, and give me, if you dare, a pattern for this tyrannical power.” Men’s tyrannical power and the ensuing inequality between sexes constitute first of all a violation of the cosmic harmony and justice:

Reconsider animals, consult the elements, study plants, finally, cast an eye over all the variations of all living organisms; yield to the evidence that I have given you: search, excavate and discover, if you can, sexual characteristics in the workings of nature: everywhere you will find them intermingled, everywhere cooperating harmoniously within this immortal masterpiece.

From this perfect system, “only man has cobbled together a rule to exclude himself [. . .]. Bizarre, blind, puffed up with science and degenerate, in this century of enlightenment and wisdom, with the crassest ignorance, he wants to command, like a despot, a sex that is blessed with every intellectual faculty.” Thus, de Gouges roots her argument in a robust appreciation of



the justice of nature as grounded in God's creation, with which men's "tyrannical power" is put in contrast. While throughout the realm of nature we can observe harmonious cooperation between the sexes, only man has tried to exempt himself from this perfect system and to dominate over the other sex.

## 2.2 *An Ambiguous Reflex*

As I will argue, the problem with this view of justice as based in the laws of nature, which constitutes the backbone of de Gouges's argument throughout her text, is not only that it is factually false with regard to the realm of nature, but, more importantly, that it is conceptually detrimental to the advancement of equality between sexes. Since the ideal pattern is that of the establishment or reestablishment of an alleged natural harmony coinciding with a condition of fulfilled happiness, justice, and morality, de Gouges's main concern is not so much with women autonomy and liberty, but rather with their virtue and its contribution to society's virtue and happiness. Thus, in the Preamble, we read:

Mothers, daughters, sisters, representatives of the Nation, all demand to be constituted into a national assembly. Given that ignorance, disregard or the disdain of the rights of woman are the only causes of public misfortune and the corruption of governments [they] have decided to make known in a solemn declaration the natural, inalienable and sacred rights of woman; this declaration, constantly in the thoughts of all members of society, will ceaselessly remind them of their rights and responsibilities, allowing the political acts of women, and those of men, to be compared in all respects to the aims of political institutions, which will become increasingly respected, so that the demands of female citizens, henceforth based on simple and incontestable principles, will always seek to maintain the constitution, good morals and the happiness of all.

Here the inclusive idea of rights as natural and sacred and the claim for equality are explicitly linked to the idea that the aim of the demands of female citizens is to maintain "the constitution, good morals and the happiness of all." Certainly, this aspect is strongly present already in the DRM, which the DRW critically reflects. There is, however, an important difference. The DRM *assumes*—for better or worse—an autonomous subject as its own groundwork (universalist aspect), denying at the same time, on alleged naturalistic grounds, this autonomy to women and other groups (exclusionary aspect). The DRW, instead of firmly challenging the exclusionary aspect, thus making the universalist one truly inclusive, reflects at least to some extent the stereotypes leading to the exclusion and does not hence fully counter the exclusionary aspect in the name of an equal claim to



autonomy independent of its consequences for the virtue and the happiness of society. Led by a concern for the virtue of society as a whole, de Gouges oscillates between the claim for the extension to women of the rights already granted to men and the juxtaposition of the two sexes. In the following I will attempt to substantiate this point.

Articles I–III state the equality of women and men in terms of rights and, on this basis, elaborate on the nature and purposes of political organizations and sovereignty. The issue of inequality is directly tackled in Article IV, where we read: “The only limit to the exercise of the natural rights of woman is the perpetual tyranny that man opposes to it: these limits must be reformed by the laws of nature and reason.” The arbitrary and unjust rule of man’s tyranny needs to be replaced through the laws of nature and reason. These, Article V continues, only acknowledge one criterion as to the limitation of rights: “The laws of nature and reason forbid all acts that are harmful to society: anything not forbidden by these wise and divine laws must be allowed and no one can be constrained to do what the laws do not demand.” Laws of nature, laws of reason, and divine laws are here explicitly equated. De Gouges conceives of them in liberal terms: whatever they do not forbid is allowed. Hence, we have a conclusion from the equality dictated by nature/reason/god to political equality. This political equality is then specified and discussed in its consequences in the remaining articles, from legislation and public offices (VI) to crime and punishment (VII–IX), freedom of expression (X–XI), the common good (XII), taxation, administration, and accountability of public officers (XIII–XV), constitution and division of powers (XVI), and, finally, property rights (XVII). Article XI is particularly interesting in this context as it calls for “the free expression of thoughts and opinions [as] one of the most precious rights of woman” based on the argument “that this liberty ensures the legitimacy of fathers and their children.” In other terms, the freedom of expression on the side of women guarantees the legitimacy of children since in this case “any Female citizen can [. . .] freely declare ‘I am the mother of your child’,” whereby, of course, the law should also punish the abuses of this freedom. This is one of the points where de Gouges insists on difference rather than equality.<sup>12</sup>

It is however in the following long Postscript that, in my opinion, the DRW’s ambiguities become more evident. De Gouges directly addresses women, observing that their gain from the Revolution is “a greater scorn, a more pronounced disdain.” The most visible ambiguity is that on the one hand she blames women for being “blind” and for having “done more harm than good,” thus reinforcing traditional stereotypes, while on the other hand she blames this situation on the existing inequality between sexes, especially as far as marriage laws and education are concerned. Another ambiguity concerns women autonomy as such. De Gouges addresses women as following: “Whatever barriers are thrown in your way it is in your power to overcome them; you simply have to want to,” so that women are apparently



conceived as not only potentially, but also actually fully autonomous. Right after, however, de Gouges makes clear that a real change in the equality between sexes can only be brought about through an educational reform from above: "Let us move on and reflect on the frightful position that women held in society; given that a system of national education is now being contemplated, let us see if our wise Legislators will be rational in their consideration of the education of women." It hence turns out that apparently women cannot just overcome obstacles through their sheer will, but need a new and rational system of education. While this argument is perfectly reasonable, one cannot overlook the ambiguity in the conception of the status of women.

Possibly because of such ambiguities, the conclusion of the postscript is itself aporetic and sarcastic:

If trying to give my sex an honorable and fair substance seems, at this time, paradoxical on my part, like attempting the impossible, then I will leave the glory of treating on this matter to the men to come but, while we wait, we can pave the way through national education, the reestablishment of morals, and by addressing conjugal conventions.

It is not clear at all whether de Gouges expects an improvement through the direct action of women based on an autonomously gained enlightenment, beginning with herself and the Queen, or through moral, political, and institutional reform, or through a combination of both factors. This is by the way a recurring problem in the Post-Enlightenment or Post-revolutionary period.<sup>13</sup> In the case of de Gouges, the issue takes the following form: how are we to introduce more equality between sexes in the institutions, if individual immorality is the rule? And vice versa: How are we to achieve a moral improvement of the individuals with regard to the institutionalization of sexual differences within unjust institutions? If the aim is to achieve just institutions, it is question begging to simply demand just institutions or just laws as means to this aim. If, on the contrary, the aim is to reform the morality of women and consequently of society as a whole, then the idea that women can simply overcome all the barriers thrown in their way in order to achieve that is, again, question-begging.

So, even when we read what is possibly the most progressive and radical proposal de Gouges advances here, namely the wonderfully egalitarian *Frame for a Social Contract between Man and Woman*, we are bound to ask: What is the function of this proposal? Is it a demand that the National Assembly, or the King, or whoever is in charge replace the traditional marriage form with this egalitarian one through the coercive use of political power? Or is it a regulative ideal to which women (and men) should aspire in the relationship between the sexes in order to pursue an elevation of morality which might (or might not), at some point, be institutionalized?



### 2.3 *Moral Elevation or Individual Autonomy?*

All the issues raised up to this point with regard to de Gouges' manifesto point to a more general one: Why should an institutionally secured equality between sexes aim at the moral elevation of women in the first place? De Gouges offers "an invincible method to elevate the souls of women: they must be included in all the practices of men; if men obstinately find this system impracticable then let them share their wealth with women, not dependent on their whim but through the wisdom of law." Here, the equality and freedom of women do not seem to be so much an end in themselves, but rather a "method" to the higher aim, that of elevating the souls of women. In more contemporary terms, the aim of "the wisdom of law" is not so much the protection of individual liberties and rights, but rather the perfectionist moral (and possibly religious) elevation of women, which in turn will contribute to the moral perfection of society as a whole.

In brief: Just like the rest of creation, human society can flourish only if it respects the original harmony and equality. This is not happening because of men's exercise of tyrannical power. Such power, however, rests to a higher or lower extent on, or is at least jointly liable with, women's weakness and vice. Obviously, if this is so, then the primary concern is not for the independence and freedom of each woman as an individual, but rather for the moral elevation of women as a societal group. This is necessary to the well-being of society because, as already mentioned,

women have done more harm than good. Constraint and dissimulation have been their lot. What force stole from them, ruse returned; they had to resort to the power of their charms and the most irreproachable man could not resist. All was submitted to them, poison, the sword; they commanded over crime as over virtue. The French government, in particular, depended for centuries on the nocturnal administration of women; their indiscretion prised secrets from the cabinet, ambassadors, officers, ministers, presidents, pontiffs, cardinals, all that characterises the stupidity of men, sacred or profane, all was subject to the cupidity and ambition [of women].

This passage cannot be simply considered as a polemic tirade: it is rather the basic idea on which de Gouges' project is rooted. Men are stupid, insofar as they are not able to resist the charms of women. Women are immoral, insofar as they take advantage of men's stupidity for political purposes, since their charms are their only weapon. This leads to ever-increasing injustice, corruption, and immorality in the whole society. Thus, it seems, the solution is to enforce equality between sexes so that women will not have to resort to their charms as their only weapon, but will be effectively free to share practices and liberties as peers with men. Consequently, public affairs will not be decided in the "nocturnal administration" through the pernicious



combination of women's cupidity and men's stupidity, but rather in a rational, moral way. This will then lead to a moral improvement of society as a whole, and to the establishment or reestablishment of the just order of human things that nature and its creator demand. The circle of the DRW's main philosophical argument is thus closed.

Now, this very idea of demanding equality as a remedy to women's cupidity and to men's stupidity is, if not straight out offensive,<sup>14</sup> at least counter-productive, as it reinforces stereotypes which, in that context, were certainly more harmful to women than to men, who were *already* conceived and treated as autonomous subjects. Second, it is a *non sequitur*, since as long as those necessary reforms are not implemented, the "nocturnal administration" will continue, and on the other hand, as long as the "nocturnal administration" continues, it will be impossible to implement the reforms. Third, and most important, the perfectionist claim risks to jeopardize the actual extension of liberal principles to the issue of equality between sexes. That institutional equality will lead to moral elevation is not only not granted and would require an additional argument: It is also irrelevant.

To finally state my central criticism, also in order to introduce the alternative—and, to me, more appealing—view discussed in the next section, I claim that the great absent in de Gouge's view is just the notion of autonomy.<sup>15</sup> More in particular, the initial question: "Man, are you capable of being just?" does not call for a discussion about women morality, but about their autonomy. With regard to the equality between sexes, a society can be just also under conditions of moral corruption, as long as no sex is institutionally privileged. And, on the contrary, we can easily imagine a society of virtuous individuals of both sexes, in which for one reason or another there is no equality between sexes. The central point is that equality between sexes and women virtue as leading to society's morality and justice run along two distinct lines of argument. Establishing equality between sexes is something to be pursued for the sake of women autonomy, whatever its outcome, and not for the sake of their or their society's virtue or happiness.

Thus, while the articles of de Gouge's Declaration, together with the *Frame for a social Contract between Man and Woman*, offer without doubt an attractive view of equality between men and women (especially regarding the family and the legal treatment of children), the conceptual backbone of the DRW, inspired by a republican-perfectionist approach, mostly fails to provide an adequately progressive framework. The DRW ends up being an odd blend of revolutionary demands and endorsement of monarchy and church, of enlightenment and religious claims, of liberal ideas and wholesale moralistic observations. This critical conclusion is certainly not meant to deny the historical importance of de Gouges's work and the fact that the paradoxes it contains (at least to some extent, in a self-aware manner) are conducive to the exposition of the paradoxes of the explicitly non-inclusive universalism of the DRM and of its philosophical-political groundwork.<sup>16</sup> The point is rather that the proposal she advances is inspired by ideas which



reveal themselves ultimately oblivious of the intrinsic value of women's autonomy, and which, instead of contributing to the necessary extension of the scope of the DRM's universalism, run the risk of jeopardizing it altogether. De Gouges's claim for equality actually aims at bringing about virtue and happiness in society; at the same time, she argues that women cannot be treated as equals because they are not virtuous. This argument is not only circular: It is also detrimental to the cause of equality, and this is so, from my point of view, mostly because of the absence of individual autonomy.

### 3. Susan Moller Okin

#### 3.1 *The Limits of Liberal Justice*

I will now turn to Susan Moller Okin, whose criticism of the non-egalitarian character of most conceptions of justice is rooted in a full appreciation of the idea of the subject of justice as neutral and autonomous, so much so that her argument culminates in a call for the elimination of gender. Okin's influential book *Justice, Gender, and the Family* begins by noticing the incompatibility between the basic claims of "liberty and justice for all" in the US Pledge of Allegiance on the one hand and the existence of "substantial inequalities between the sexes" (Okin 1989, 3)<sup>17</sup> on the other hand. Unlike de Gouges, individual autonomy, and not society's happiness, virtue, and cohesion, are at the heart of her concerns. This is so even though the word "autonomy" with its derivatives only has a few occurrences in the book. First of all, as a matter of fact, the *pars construens* of her argument is an attempt to show how Rawls's theory of justice can be made egalitarian with regard to gender issues, and as we saw in the beginning autonomy is a central pillar of Rawls's construction. Furthermore, this attempt is sparkled by the main criticism in her *pars destruens*, namely that "the fact that human beings are born as helpless infants—not as the purportedly autonomous actors who populate political theories—is obscured by the implicit assumption of gendered families, operating outside the range of the theories" (13). Hence, the main problem is that the autonomous subject, while being a philosophical construct presupposing a gendered structure of society, and most particularly of the family, is simply assumed by political theories as something given. The fact that helpless infants can become autonomous actors only thanks to the largely unacknowledged domestic and educational work of women is simply ignored and remains "outside the range of the theories." Most theories of justice merely assume and describe the subject as already autonomous, an assumption only made possible by a gendered structure which, in turn, results in the limited autonomy of just those individuals on whom the achievement of the autonomy of that subject is predicated!

Okin's aim vis-à-vis this paradox is, as I will argue, to criticize the idea of an autonomous neutral subject as a descriptive tool, while strongly advocating its normative power. In other terms, the autonomous neutral subject is



not something already given, that can be used as the starting point of theories overlooking its genesis, but the ultimate horizon of truly liberal social reform endeavors. As already announced by the title, the lynchpin of the named structural inequality, defining for the practice and ignored by theory, as well as of any attempt to gradually solve it, is the family: "Until there is justice within the family, women will not be able to gain equality in politics, at work, or in any other sphere" (4). Thus, "there is clearly a major 'justice crisis' in contemporary society arising from issues of gender" (7). This is not only a problem of social practice: "To a large extent, contemporary theories of justice, like those of the past, are about men with wives at home" (13). This is to a good extent so because family, "while neglected, is *assumed* by theorists of justice." (9) Most liberal theories of justice cannot be read as truly neutral toward individuals of both sexes: the "add women and stir" method does not really warrant neutrality (11).

While Okin fully dismisses communitarian and libertarian approaches, she strongly criticizes the liberal one, but at the same time acknowledges that only liberalism "contains the possibility of encompassing the answers to feminist questions." (61) She clearly situates herself in the liberal tradition and, in particular, as already mentioned, recognizes the potential of Rawls's theory of justice for feminism, while at the same time highlighting its shortcomings. Rawls's potential to contribute to feminist issues is investigated with regard to the question: "Can justice co-exist with gender?" (90). In Okin's assessment of this potential the most serious critique to Rawls is the one about "the barely visible family" (93), that is, the fact that "family is to a large extent ignored, though assumed," in his theory (93). Rawls's two famous principles of distributive justice apply to the "basic structure of the society," that is, to the major social institutions. The monogamous family is, in the context analyzed by Rawls, clearly one of such major social institutions; however, he does not consider whether it is just according to the two principles, but rather assumes that it is, as if family was either always just by itself or opaque to claims of justice (see 94).

Here I cannot enter into the detail of Okin's sophisticated argument on Rawls. I will only present its main conclusions. On the one hand, she shows how Rawls's theory, if opportunely adjusted, can be used to criticize "gender-structured social institutions" (105). On the other hand, she reaches, critically following Rawlsian lines, a more radical conclusion. In a gendered society, sex is just not "a contingent and morally irrelevant characteristic, such that human beings really can hypothesize ignorance of this fact about them" (105). In other terms, as long as we live in a gendered society, we cannot simply remove the sex difference through Rawls's device of the original position with the veil of ignorance. To paraphrase, in a gendered society justice can never be truly neutral as to sex. Considerations of justice, while claiming to be neutral, apply in fact in two different ways to the two sexes. This however violates the neutrality principle as such, for which the subjects of justice are not women and men, but neutral individuals. Since



Okin subscribes to a liberal-Rawlsian conception of justice, the logical consequence is that “the disappearance of gender is a prerequisite for the *complete* development of a nonsexist, fully human theory of justice” (105). Briefly: The answer to the question we saw above is that, if we take justice seriously, then justice and gender cannot coexist.

Now this conclusion decidedly reshifts the line of the argument. The topic is no longer the adequacy of a conception of justice to a given society, but rather the adequacy of society to a normative idea. Correspondingly, the strongest line of criticism seems to be directed not so much against flawed theories of justice, but rather against a fundamentally unequal society. This shift seems to introduce a tension in Okin’s argument. The tension can be formulated as follows: As long as there is a gendered society, theories of justice need to take gender into account, but as long as theories of justice take gender into account they cannot really talk about justice in its full sense. Rawls’s theory is not so much to be criticized because it cancels differences among sexes by dealing with a neutral abstract subject, but rather because that neutral abstract subject does not exist in the real world, or more precisely—and the difference is crucial—it does not exist *yet*. In other terms, the problem is not treating as equal individuals who cannot be equal because they belong to different sexes, but rather treating as equal individuals who have been made unequal by the gendered society.

### *3.2 Theory and Practice of the Elimination of Gender*

However, I maintain that the tension I just described, unlike in de Gouges’ case, is actually a productive one. Okin has a strong argument insofar as her emphasis is clearly not on women’s moralization or happiness, but on freedom and autonomy. Her problem is not the moral elevation of women and society, but how to prevent gender-structured institutions from doing injustice to women (and children) with different familial, moral, and social expectations and standards: “Since evidently we do not all agree about what [marriage] is or should be, we must think in terms of building family and work institutions that enable people to structure their personal lives in different ways” (169). The call for a subjection of the main institutions—including family—to principles of justice and legal regulation is not led by moralistic concerns, but rather by the necessity to protect women (and children) from social vulnerabilities, so that they may pursue their choices to a fuller extent:

If they are to avoid injustice to women and children, these institutions must encourage the avoidance of socially created vulnerabilities by facilitating and reinforcing the equal sharing of paid and unpaid work between men and women, and consequently the equalizing of their opportunities and obligations in general.

(169)



This means, first and foremost, that family, as “the linchpin of gender,” “needs to be a just institution” (170).<sup>18</sup> Now, even though I am concerned here with the general issue of the relationship between gender and liberal conceptions of justice, and not with the specific practical proposals by the authors I am discussing, I want to briefly refer to one aspect of Okin’s proposal, aimed at reforming family and making it a just institution, that is particularly representative of her approach. While it is clear that the gender-structured marriage is at the origin of many issues she is confronting, she is realistically aware that we cannot just condemn this institution and expect that it will dissolve in any foreseeable future. The point then becomes to accept it as a structural part of our current social reality, yet a problematic one, to be regulated and restricted through law: “Gender-structured marriage, then, needs to be regarded as a currently necessary institution (because still chosen by some) but one that is socially problematic. It should be subjected to a number of legal requirements, at least when there are children” (180). So, even though the opposite is often the case,

there is no need for the division of labor between the sexes to involve the economic dependence, either complete or partial, of one partner on the other. Such dependence can be avoided if both partners have *equal legal entitlement* to all earnings coming into the household.

(180–181)

Even within a thoroughly traditional marriage in which the man is the breadwinner and the woman is the homemaker, it is possible to avoid dependence on the woman’s side by legally entitling her to half of the earnings directly made by the man. This is because the man’s full-time employment and the ensuing earnings are premised on the woman’s caring for the house and the children, and a “just” family would be one in which this division of labor is legally acknowledged in economic terms. Concretely, “the clearest and simplest way of doing this would be to have employers make out wage checks equally divided between the earner and the partner who provides all or most of his or her unpaid domestic services” (181). I think that this specific case is representative of Okin’s blend of unyielding, passionate struggle for equality and lucid, concrete realism. Her proposals do not question or undermine the liberal model: In fact, they aim at extending and actualizing it in a fuller way.

Ultimately, however, Okin is adamant that a full solution to the question of justice comes only through the elimination of gender: “A just future would be one without gender. In its social structures and practices, one’s sex would have no more relevance than one’s eye color or the length of one’s toes. No assumptions would be made about ‘male’ and ‘female’ roles” (171). In short, “if we are to be at all true to our democratic ideals, moving away from gender is essential” (172). Nonetheless, at the same time, she takes pluralism seriously, insofar as she envisages “carefully protective



institutions for those who wished to follow gender-structured modes of life” (175). Consequently, while she thinks that there cannot be a full justice as long as there is gender in society, she also attempts to envisage ways in which inequality and injustice can be reduced even for individuals opting for traditional familial and social models. The twofold strategies she pursues is effectively summed up in the warning that “while protecting those whom gender now makes more vulnerable, we must also put our best efforts into promoting the elimination of gender” (183–184).

Okin’s proposal is complex and ambitious, insofar as it attempts to combine radical feminist claims with a defense of pluralism, and a passionate defense of individual freedom with the recognition of the necessity of legal interventions and restrictions to address the gender issue.<sup>19</sup> Even though she aims for a profound transformation of society, her focus is not on group or societal morality or happiness. Rather, she aims at guaranteeing and enhancing equal liberties for everyone, including individuals that would not give up a traditional understanding of gender roles (that is, who would not subscribe to her own theory).<sup>20</sup> Okin clearly does not step back from the neutrality principle, but on the contrary calls for its consequent and unlimited application: with respect to social structures and practices, as we saw, sex should be as irrelevant as the length of one’s toes. Admittedly, she puts an emphasis on the difference, not only on the equality, but difference is by and large a social construct with no objective grounds. Theories of justice have to consider the existence of this socially produced difference—gender—in our society: Neglecting it would mean ignoring or downplaying existing inequalities between two groups (men and women), and thus, in concrete terms, privileging one group over the other.

Since, however, this neglect is often the case, the purported neutral attitude of contemporary theories of justice with regard to gender issues leads as a matter of fact to the violation of the neutrality principle, or more precisely it covers and legitimizes this socially existing violation. The neglect of gender by theories of justice, as long as gender exists, does not follow from the neutrality principle, but rather violates it. At the same time, on the other hand, the very existence of gender violates the neutrality principle. In order to address the issue of sex equality at both these levels while avoiding circularity, Okin’s approach follows a twofold strategy centered on autonomy. The strategy is promising because it does not try to impose a perfectionist view of society, but on the contrary it fully acknowledges the fact that a thorough recognition of the value of individual autonomy implies the acceptance of a plurality of conceptions of the good, life-styles, family forms, etc., including the ones that seem incompatible with our own views. While the neutrality principle is shown to be inadequate for a full understanding of the flaws and inequalities of our present society, it still remains the normative reference point giving the direction for change and reform.<sup>21</sup>



## 4. Conclusion

This chapter's goal was to contrast two possible ways of addressing the issue of injustice created by inequality between sexes in a liberal context. While de Gouges's ultimate aim is the common good, the virtue and morality of the society, Okin's focus is about the full autonomy of each subject, independently of their sex. I argued that de Gouges's republican-perfectionist proposal, while providing valuable criticism of the non-inclusive universalism and paradoxes of the DRM, leads to an oscillation between the claim for equal political rights and a rather stereotypical juxtaposition of the two sexes. As a result, her model presents not only several substantial ambiguities, but also some tenets that appear to be outright detrimental to the advancement of equality between sexes. On the contrary, Okin's liberal-Rawlsian model does not reject the neutrality principle, but powerfully criticizes its unqualified assumption in most theories of justice, including Rawls's own one. By assuming the neutrality of the subject, most theories of justice remain blind to the gender-based inequality in society, and most notably within family. Thus, Okin criticizes the descriptive value of the neutrality assumption, while at the same time defending its normative-regulative power. Accordingly, she promotes a sophisticated, multi-layered liberalism reform model aimed at the full realization of an autonomy and neutrality-based liberal conception of justice, envisaging the disappearance of gender as its ultimate aim. Okin's model, as the paper argued, appears more able to avoid ambiguities and overall more convincing than de Gouges' one, insofar as it promotes a conception of justice in which the sexes are truly equal because the central focus is individual autonomy with its socio-political implications.

## Notes

- 1 I would like to thank the Department of Philosophy at Yeditepe University, Istanbul, and especially its chairman, Saffet Babür: Their support allowed us to organize the international workshop "Women Philosophers on Autonomy" (May 2016), where I presented an early draft of this chapter. I also thank the audience of the workshop for the feedback and the stimulating discussions. Finally, I thank Çiğdem Oğuz and Sandrine Bergès, whose insightful critique led to substantial improvements of my paper, and Alessandro Siani for the precious linguistic suggestions.
- 2 While some feminist critics have rejected the ideal of autonomy altogether, others have proposed to reframe it, most notably in terms of relational autonomy: See Veltman and Piper 2014, 4.
- 3 For a general assessment, see Robeyns 2010.
- 4 I have discussed the reasons, limits, and possible consequences of this critique in Siani 2013.
- 5 Clearly, completely discarding individual autonomy for the sake of the common good means abandoning the liberal conception altogether: This chapter, however, will not deal with this option.



- 6 This alternative is related to, but not identical with, the alternative between “equality” and “difference” in the feminist debate: See the first chapter of Wallach Scott 1996.
- 7 See Wallach Scott 1996, 3.
- 8 From now on: DRM.
- 9 Unless otherwise stated, all the quotes in this second section are taken from here. In order to prevent confusion, from now on, I will refer to the whole document with the abbreviation DRW, and to the actual declaration contained in it as “Declaration.”
- 10 The *Frame*, envisaging the overcoming of traditional marriage, is possibly the most authentically revolutionary and interesting piece of the entire document. See Wallach Scott 1996, 43–44.
- 11 I agree that “it does not belittle her genius to qualify the *Déclaration* as political—women have the right to participate in government—and practical—all children are valuable—rather than as an essentialist reflection on the profound implications of sexual difference” (Sherman 2013, 8).
- 12 Wallach Scott 1989, 11, claims that the “very specificity [of the argument used by de Gouges] weakened its objective.”
- 13 For example, Friedrich Schiller asks a similar question in his 1794 Letters on the aesthetic education of man: “When the mechanic has to mend a watch, he lets the wheels run out, but the living watchworks of the state have to be repaired while they act, and a wheel has to be exchanged for another during its revolutions” (Schiller 1794, II letter). It is telling the Letters also end in an aporetic way.
- 14 Whether more for women or for men is an open question.
- 15 This absence cannot be attributed to purely historical reasons (de Gouges and Kant are contemporaries), but is rather an aspect of de Gouges’s republican-perfectionist conception of society.
- 16 In this sense, I certainly agree with Wallach Scott 1996, 20, that de Gouges’s manifesto “is arguably the most comprehensive call for women’s rights in this period; it takes the Revolution’s universalism at its word; and it exposes the incompleteness of that universalism in its own paradoxical attempts to represent women as abstract individuals by calling attention to the differences they embody.”
- 17 Unless otherwise stated, all the quotes in this third section are taken from here; only page numbers will be given in brackets.
- 18 This point, as we know, has been largely ignored by most theories of justice. Okin openly acknowledges that “this is a complex question. It is particularly so because we place great value on our freedom to live different kinds of lives, there is no current consensus on many aspects of gender, and we have good reason to suspect that many of our beliefs about sexual difference and appropriate sex roles are heavily influenced by the very fact that we grew up in a gender-structured society” (171). I will come back in short to the practical implications of Okin’s pluralistic acknowledgment of the profound complexity of the question, which is however in her work well counterbalanced by a firm commitment to a broader extension and actualization of equality, as based on substantial and not only formal autonomy.
- 19 It is significant that Okin has been both appreciated and criticized by authors representing opposite standpoints: E.g. Nussbaum 1993 criticizes her, from her “capabilities”-oriented approach, for leaving too much space to the privateness of individual choices, whereas McKittrick 2006 criticizes her, from a libertarian standpoint, for leaving it too little space.



- 20 Incidentally, despite all differences in their philosophical approaches, Okin is in this respect close to De Beauvoir 2010, 36–37, whose words actually constitute a valuable criticism of de Gouges: “If we examine some of the books on women, we see that one of the most frequently held points of view is that of public good or general interest: in reality, this is taken to mean the interest of society as each one wishes to maintain or establish it. In our opinion, there is no public good other than one that assures the citizens’ private good; we judge institutions from the point of view of the concrete opportunities they give to individuals. But neither do we confuse the idea of private interest with happiness: that is another frequently encountered point of view; are women in a harem not happier than a woman voter? Is a housewife not happier than a woman worker? We cannot really know what the word “happiness” means, and still less what authentic values it covers; there is no way to measure the happiness of others, and it is always easy to call a situation that one would like to impose on others happy.”
- 21 This approach does not only apply to classical issues in the liberalism and gender debate, but it also has significant repercussions, among others, on the topic of the relationship between multiculturalism and state neutrality from the feminist perspective. The main question is formulated as follows in Okin 1999, 9: “What should be done when the claims of minority cultures or religions clash with the norm of gender equality that is at least formally endorsed by liberal states (however much they continue to violate it in their practices)?” The tension thereby pinpointed between feminism and the multiculturalist commitment to the protection of group rights is addressed, again, through the combined defense of the normative character of the liberal neutrality principle and its criticism as a purely descriptive tool where the issue of gender and justice is concerned.

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# 10 Autonomy, Divinity, and the Common Good

## Selflessness as a Source of Freedom in Thomas Hill Green and Mary Augusta Ward

*Patrick Fessenbecker*

To the extent that it is remembered today, Mary Ward's 1888 novel *Robert Elsmere* is famous for two reasons. First, it was arguably the best-selling novel of the 19th century, with more than a million copies sold.<sup>1</sup> Second, it was one of the most overt novels of ideas in Victorian literature, and it intervened in one of the most vexed questions in Victorian intellectual culture—the possibility that Christian doctrine might be false, and that religious skepticism might be justified.<sup>2</sup> A significant portion of the novel, in fact, involves intellectual exchanges between the protagonist Robert and various philosophers, who are literally introduced as characters and modeled on real Victorian intellectuals.

The most straightforward example of this modeling is the character Mr. Grey, who is a straightforward representation of the British Idealist philosopher T.H. Green. Indeed, Green's thought looms large over the book: not only does Ward put actual quotations from Green's work in Grey's mouth, the novel is in fact dedicated to Green. Understandably, then, critics have tended to see the philosophy in the novel as essentially unoriginal, with Ward's thought primarily being a popularization of Green's—as one writer puts it, she is an element in the broader “Greenian Moment” (Leighton 2004).

In this chapter, however, I would like to question the default assumption that the philosophy in *Elsmere* and elsewhere in Ward's fiction is unoriginal. Admittedly, this kind of argument involves reading Ward somewhat against the grain: Her fiction highlights much more strongly her sympathy towards and general agreement with Green's views than it does any disagreement. Still, at least, we do a disservice to her work as a reader of Green in accepting such a dismissal: Even at their most unoriginal, her novels serve as a creative interpretation of Green's thought, a coherent and interesting attempt to make sense of the key themes of his work and the way they connected. And, more substantively, I will suggest Ward questions Green's view about the necessary conditions for personal autonomy. Her representation of fundamental disagreements that defy resolution, even when both parties to the



disagreement love each other and want to resolve the situation, suggests a deep skepticism about a key condition for full freedom for Green—a shared recognition of the common good.

But part of the reason these representations suggest skepticism stems less from obvious disagreements with Green's thought and more from the implications of the form Ward chose. As we will see, incarnating philosophical views in individual characters while using other characters to embody disagreements and objections and then letting the interaction between characters symbolize the dispute between them is not really a neutral way to interpret a philosophical position. Yet it is an inevitable result of the fact that the texts in question are novels, and more specifically novels with marriage plots. So the question about Ward's originality or lack thereof is also a question about the relationship between philosophy and literature, and whether the emplotment of a view can ever leave the view unchanged. Put another way, Ward's most significant disagreement with Green might have been the basic decision to write fiction instead of philosophy in the first place.

That claim, however, will have to wait a bit. Let us begin instead with a more straightforward question: What was T. H. Green doing in a novel in the first place?

\* \* \*

Thomas Hill Green (1836–1882) was perhaps the most famous of the British Idealists, whose influence rose rapidly in the third quarter of the 19th century and then declined just as rapidly at the beginning of the 20th. His fame, however, stemmed less from his writing—most of which was published posthumously—and more from his teaching at Oxford. As a result of Green's work, as one intellectual historian has put it, “from aristocratic Oxford [. . .] there came a stream of serious young men dedicated to reform in politics, social work, and the civil service” (Richter 1956: 444). Green's teaching inspired his students to pursue public service because he offered a creative way to think about the relationship between individual freedom and the general welfare: Rather than seeing the two as inevitably in tension, he argued that an individual could only achieve full self-realization and therefore autonomy through the pursuit of the common good. Drawing his inspiration from Hegel, Green thus argued that the state and the individual need not be in tension: Indeed, ideally, they were mutually reflective. One lecture in particular—the “Different Senses of ‘Freedom’ as Applied to Will and the Moral Progress of Man”—illustrates Green's thinking on this issue clearly and concisely.<sup>3</sup>

The essay starts with an objection to Kant. Green writes:

Moral bondage with Kant, as with Plato and the Stoics, is bondage to the flesh. The heteronomy of the will is its submission to the impulse of pleasure-seeking, as that of which man is not in respect of his reason the



author, but which belongs to him as a merely natural being. A state of bondage to law, as such, he does not contemplate.

(Green 1906: 311)

In other words, for Kant heteronomy is entirely the result of action upon the basis of desires and inclinations: The notion that one might be heteronomous in acting on the law—that is, that acting purely on the basis of a moral law might additionally be a kind of heteronomy or “bondage”—is not a possibility Kant entertains. But since action purely on the basis of the moral law is presumably rare, this produces a state, Green argues, in which autonomy is rarely and only briefly genuinely realized: The main effect of the “consciousness of the possibility of freedom” is to make the agent aware of “the heteronomy of his will” (311).<sup>4</sup> In other words, the primary result of our ability to act freely turns out to be an awareness of how often we fail to do it.

Green then turns to Hegel, with whom he has greater sympathy. In Green’s explanation, Hegel offers the key insight that recognizes the possibility of motives “of a more concrete kind than the interest in fulfillment of a universally binding law because universally binding, but which yet are the product of a reason”: namely, the idea that an individual realizes the possibility of his abstract freedom through the concrete institutions and customs of the state (312). Such institutions and customs will be more specific and detailed than the Kantian notion of the moral law as such, but since they are the product of collective human reason, they nevertheless reflect the effects of the human ability to act on the basis of something other than inclination. Thus, Hegel points the way towards solving the problem of the tension between bondage to the flesh and bondage to the law: The key is to develop an identity that aligns instinctively with the institutions and customs of the state. Then, one will naturally (so to speak) act on the basis of reason and thus autonomously.

Green puts what one might call a perfectionist spin on this basically Hegelian picture. He is less inclined to talk about the capacity for practical deliberation—that is, the actual process of deciding what to do—and more inclined to speak of the capacity to make one’s life realize an ideal. “Real freedom,” he claims on the first page of the essay, comes from “seeking the satisfaction of himself in objects in which he believes it *should* be found, and seeking it in them *because* he believes it should be found in them” (308). It does not matter, Green implies, what beliefs agents have about what they should be pursuing: what matters is that in pursuing them because they believe they should be pursuing them, such agents manifest the capacity to act autonomously, and thus achieve the “peace or blessedness” that comes with finding one’s “object” (309). This fits naturally with Hegel’s theory of the state: “The individual’s consciousness of the absolutely desirable, of something that should be, of an ideal to be realized in his life, finds a content or object which has been constituted or brought into being by that



consciousness itself working through generations of men” (312). In other words, I give myself specific and concrete projects on the basis of the needs of my state and civil society. But since those needs are the product of generations of people trying to create the world they believe should exist, it’s really just my own ability to act on the basis of what I think should happen reflected back at me. My “consciousness of the absolutely desirable” is given content by “that consciousness itself.” As Maria Dimova-Cookson (2003) persuasively glosses this idea, the link between selflessness and social welfare here is that the moral good for me is defined by my pursuit of ordinary goods for other people (516).

But to portray autonomy this way is to reject one very common view about what freedom involves. Instead of seeing autonomy as the ability to sit back and consider which motives to act on, the product of a self that stands over and above any particular motive, autonomy lies in acting on those motives that align with one’s beliefs about what the world should be like. That’s because these motives reflect the influence of the distinct human capacity to realize an ideal. So, in acting on them an agent realizes herself. Thus, Green rejects the line of thought that portrays autonomy as the result of choice, which he thinks is an artifact of using political and interpersonal conceptions of freedom to define subjective freedom (319). The salient psychological feature is not whether an agent has freely chosen the actions to perform, but whether the motives she acts on are self-realizing. In Green’s words, “the reality of freedom [. . .] depends on the character of the objects willed” (321).

The trouble is that our capacity to act in “self-seeking” ways is the source of both our ability to realize an ideal in our actions and our capacity to act in ways that prevent us from doing so. This might seem paradoxical: “Man is subject to a law of his being,” Green writes, “which prevents him from finding satisfaction in the objects in which under the pressure of his desires it is his natural desire to seek it” (327). Because we are physical and animal creatures, our will and reason do not automatically coincide (as they would for God), and so there is a tension: We tend to pursue the ends we most desire, but such ends do not necessarily satisfy us, since they do not inherently respond to our capacity to realize an ideal. Thus the “self-realizing principle” requires support: We must educate ourselves so that our “natural impulses”—never strictly “natural,” of course—align with our “higher interests” (327). Such a person will be free not merely because her natural impulses are “thwarted by the law,” but because “these very impulses have been drawn into its service” (328).

But since the model depends on education, and therefore the institutions of civil society and “conventional morality,” the reconciliation achieved within oneself is only fully possible when accompanied by a reconciliation with the world outside oneself (331). Green has no illusions that this will happen smoothly: since our first view tends to be that conventional morality is merely something expected of us and not an expression of practical



reason, our first definite self-assertion is likely to be a “revolt” against conventional morality. Moral growth, of both the person and society, may stop here. But ideally, the agent eventually comes to recognize “the spirit underlying the letter of the obligations laid on him by society” (331). This “reconciliation of reason with itself” produces the genuinely autonomous person, who takes up the willed ideals reflected in social conventions and identifies with them, making the pursuit of such selfless goals the means by which he achieves self-satisfaction.

Let me highlight one feature of this account that will be important later. For Green, in this lecture anyway, the reconciliation of reason within oneself and with the outside world for any particular individual only involves other people incidentally—that is, insofar as they are a part of the community whose collective attitudes form the public embodiment of the capacity to pursue an ideal. That another person might matter for other reasons in the achievement of autonomy—particularly, whether they might so matter in moments where their opinions do not share in the public embodiment—is not a view Green considers seriously. As we will see, Ward is skeptical on precisely this point.

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Mary Ward, who often published under and went by her married name “Mrs Humphry Ward,” was without question born into the purple of late-Victorian intellectual culture. She was the granddaughter of Thomas Arnold, a famous head of Rugby School, and the niece of the poet and critic Matthew Arnold. Her sister married Thomas Huxley’s son and had two sons herself, one of whom (Aldous) became a novelist like his aunt. Ward was the author of more than twenty novels and a great deal of non-fiction, including a body of World War I journalism. Yet even more than for her writings, she is remembered today for her work on the question of the woman’s right to vote: Troublingly for many of her readers then and now, she was opposed to it, and became one of the public faces of the anti-suffragette movement.<sup>5</sup>

But that debate was still two decades in the future when she was writing *Robert Elsmere*. At the beginning of the 1890s, her thinking was centered on the question of how to regard religion in general and Christianity in particular. And Green’s compromise—that Christian doctrine was not literally true, but Christianity was an essential element in the progress of the human capacity to realize an ideal—appealed strongly to Ward. This account of Christianity in the role of history is one of the main themes of the novel.

As a young man, Robert Elsmere goes to Oxford to become a clergyman in the Anglican Church. In short order, he marries the deeply evangelical Catherine Leyburn and takes a position as the rector of “Murewell.” Unfortunately for Robert’s religious beliefs, the Squire of Murewell is the skeptical and deeply learned Roger Wendover. In the face of Wendover’s criticisms, and in particular his deeply informed historicist analysis of the miracles in



the Gospels, Elsmere finds himself unable to defend his views, and becomes deeply depressed and uncertain. At this point of crisis, he returns to Oxford to see his old tutor Mr. Grey—the figure of T. H. Green. Grey, tellingly, does not try to persuade Elsmere of the literal truth of the Bible; he uses a subtler strategy:

“I know very well the man of the world scoffs, but to him who has once been a Christian of the old sort, the parting with the Christian mythology is the rending asunder of bones and marrow. It means parting with half the confidence, half the joy, of life! But take heart,” and the tone grew still more solemn, still more penetrating. “It is the education of God! Do not imagine it will put you farther from Him! He is in criticism, in science, in doubt, so long as the doubt is a pure and honest doubt, as yours is. He is in all life, in all thought. The thought of man, as it has shaped itself in institutions, in philosophies, in science, in patient critical work, or in the life of charity, is the one continuous revelation of God! Look for Him in it all; see how, little by little, the Divine indwelling force, using as its tools—but *merely* as its tools!—man’s physical appetites and conditions, has built up conscience and the moral life; think how every faculty of the mind has been trained in turn to take its part in the great work of faith upon the visible world!”

(Ward 1888: 356)

The Greenian resonance of Grey’s speech is, hopefully, clear. Robert’s questioning of the truth of Christianity is not really a rejection of the religion, Grey argues, but instead a further development of it. The development of history is altogether “the continuous revelation of God”: More specifically, the divine force in each of us has, slowly but surely, contributed to the development of “conscience and the moral life.” Thus, while Robert’s doubts about the Bible may in fact be correct, he need not worry that they are a violation of God’s plan or see them as necessarily a threat to his belief in God. Instead, they represent precisely the realization of God’s will, insofar as they indicate the progress of moral conventions towards an ever-greater realization of selflessness. And Ward takes pains to make sure her reader does not miss the point:

It seemed to Robert, gazing at him with fixed eyes, that the man’s whole presence, at once so homely and so majestic, was charged with benediction. [. . .] The fiery soul beside him had kindled anew the dropping life of his own. So the torch of God passes on its way, hand reaching out to hand.

(356)

The extra-diegetic moment this passage traces, as the narrator moves from describing the scene into direct assertion in the final line of the passage, demonstrates the emphasis Ward wants to place on this point.



And Robert's reaction to this crisis, which takes place about halfway through the novel, shows that he mastered Grey's lesson. Although he leaves the Church of England and moves to London, he eventually becomes the founder of a new church and perhaps of a new religion. Somewhat confusingly, this religion is still centered on Jesus Christ—it is entitled the “New Brotherhood of Christ”—but it is based on Christ in a nontraditional sense. As Robert explains in a lengthy sermon to a skeptical but soon converted audience, “in the moral world you cannot pull down except by gentleness—you cannot revolutionize except by sympathy. Jesus only superseded Judaism by absorbing and recreating all that was best in it. [. . .] You think—because it is becoming plain to the modern eye that the ignorant love of his first followers wreathed his life in legend, that there you can escape from Jesus of Nazareth? [. . .] Folly!” (495). In other words, Jesus embodies a vitally important stage in the development of the moral consciousness of humanity, and it is a stage that cannot be superseded until we have understood and encompassed the moral value of Christianity within a broader whole that improves upon it. Merely ignoring or dismissing Christianity, as the skeptics in Robert's audience are inclined, will not do.

The subsequent success of the New Brotherhood of Christ, which we are told in the last paragraph of the novel “still exists, and grows,” and which in fact aligns with Ward's own biographical involvement with a still-existing social reform center, confirms the novel's basic assertion of the correctness of Green's account of the history of religion and the moral life.<sup>6</sup> And in keeping with Green's thought, Ward pairs this trajectory in Robert's life with an account of autonomy and heteronomy, so that Robert's recognition of the nature of the moral rationality underlying social convention functions as a freeing transformation of his relationship to society—one that contrast favorably with the heteronomy of the other characters. Let me describe this set of contrasts now.

\* \* \*

Like many 19th-century novels, *Robert Elsmere* pairs the action of its main marriage plot—Robert's relationship with Catherine, to which I will return in a moment—with a similar marriage plot in the stories of the minor characters. In this case, Ward couples the story of Robert and Catherine's relationship with the story of Catherine's sister Rose. Rose's story is in some ways more familiar: it's a love triangle. At moments in love with two men—the Oxford tutor Edward Langham and the rich heir Hugh Flaxman, both of whom are also at various moments in love with her—Rose has a brief moment where she believes she and Langham are committed to each other, only for both to realize that they do not match. Their story ends with Langham's return to his solitary life at Oxford and Rose's engagement to Flaxman.

What is important to note about Rose's story as a commentary on the main plot is that it is ultimately her own heteronomy that causes her



confused attraction to Langham and delays the successful realization of a relationship with Flaxman. Ward describes Rose at one point as acting “for the sake of that opposition her soul loved, her poor prickly soul, full under all her gaiety and indifference of the most desperate doubt and soreness” (430). The point, of course, is that Rose often fails to act autonomously precisely by insisting on acting freely. Rose is certainly stubborn, yet that stubbornness reflects less a genuine self-aware act of assertion and more an instinctive demand for respect for her own choice—choices motivated not by a pursuit of an ideal, but instead a simple opposition to whatever advice she has been given.

This tension in Rose’s self is the driving force behind the events of the Langham subplot. He rejects her early in the novel, and this rejection is a central cause of Rose’s desire to make him love her: as she thinks to herself after the final end of the relationship, “his resistance had increased the charm” (464). Yet when they encounter each other again in the same social circle London, Rose is torn—from Langham’s perspective, at any rate—between a desire to win his interest and to torment him. Describing Langham’s experience, Ward writes: “He saw that she thought badly of him. [. . .] And all the same he came, and she asked him!” (427). Indeed, Langham begins to suspect that he is being deliberately manipulated: “It began to seem to him that she was specially bent often on tormenting *him* by these caprices of hers” (431).

But after Langham asserts himself and they reconcile, it becomes clear to him that something much less deliberate was driving her actions. Langham—in a sobering moment for academic readers of the novel!—believes that his long-solitary life has rendered him incapable of the kind of selflessness that is necessary for a genuinely loving relationship with someone else. “My habits are the tyrants of years,” he tells her: “I have lived alone, for myself, in myself, till sometimes there seems to be hardly anything left in me to love or be loved” (447). Yet Rose experiences this message in a way rather different than Langham intends: she sees, in his belief that their relationship would fail, a condemnation of her own capacity for selflessness: “Had she been other than she is—more loving, less self-absorbed, loftier in motive—he could not have loved her so, have left her so” (454). Thus his rejection of her becomes a moral awakening. He recognizes her own moral failure, in that her own affection for him is more of an instinctive reaction than a reflection of her genuine beliefs about what she should do. But she also comes to recognize this fact about herself—indeed, recognizes it in part because he recognizes it: “A painful humility—a boundless pity—the rise of some moral wave within her. [. . .] These were some of the impressions which passed from her to him” (459). Thus, she begins the transition to genuine autonomy—a freedom that lies not in the insistence of choice above all, with its juvenile insistence on opposition, but a deeper self-determination.

It is worth briefly comparing Rose and *Elsmere* to Ward’s 1894 novel *Marcella*, where a story similar to Rose’s becomes the main plot of the



novel. At the beginning of the novel, Marcella attracts the attention of the rich nobleman Aldous Raeburn; she accepts his proposal and becomes engaged to him not because she loves him—the narrative is quite clear on this point—but because she thinks she can use his money and political position to support the Socialist causes she believes in (which include, not incidentally, the abolition of the aristocracy). However, her beliefs about social welfare are thoroughly imbricated with egoism. In a passage that fades into free indirect discourse (that is, sentences that merge the thought of the character with that of the narrator), Ward writes:

As the eyes of servants towards the hand of their mistress—the old words occurred to her as she thought of herself stepping in and out of the cottages. Then she was ashamed of herself and rejected the image with vehemence. Dependence was the curse of the poor. Her whole aim, of course, should be to teach them to stand on their own feet, to know themselves as men. But naturally they would be grateful, they would let themselves be led. Intelligence and enthusiasm give power, and ought to give it—power for good.

(Ward 1894: 101)<sup>7</sup>

The point here, of course, is that Marcella is drawn to the idea that she will be elevated and praised for her social welfare—or, more cynically, that the artificial hierarchy created by economic inequality will reappear as a more genuine hierarchy based on genuine moral inequality. The moral opacity is reinforced by a sly detail on Ward's part—Marcella appoints herself the mission of comforting the troubled wife of a poor man, even to the extent of eventually becoming her roommate in London after the husband's arrest, but the poor woman is in fact irritated by Marcella's constant interference and dislikes her company.<sup>8</sup> Unsurprisingly, this view on her marriage does not lead to the growth of a healthy relationship, and her engagement to Raeburn soon ends.

But as with Rose, the moral self-awareness that comes with the end of the relationship is the birth of a greater moral consciousness. Marcella moves to London and becomes a nurse to the poor, and moves past the egoistic shallowness caught up in her previous commitment to social welfare. This greater social awareness, however, is of a piece with the development of the capacity to love and a recognition of the history of selflessness implicit in religion. Ward writes:

Nobody could live in hospital—nobody could go among the poor [. . .] without understanding that it is still here in the world—this “grace” that “sustaineth”—however variously interpreted, still living and working, as it worked of old, among the little Galilean towns, in Jerusalem, in Corinth [. . .] it meant the motive power of life—something subduing, transforming, delivering.

(387)



Marcella's move to caring genuinely for social welfare, then, produces four corresponding movements that, properly speaking, each cause each other: it is at once a move past egoism into selflessness, the development of the ability to act with genuine autonomy, the achievement of a capacity to love, and a cognitive recognition of the moral truths inherent in Christian practice.

The novel completes this trajectory with Marcella becoming engaged to Aldous again. But this time, Marcella's moral transformation has fundamentally altered their relationship:

Yet that passionate sympathy with the poor—that hatred of oppression? Even these seemed to her to-night the blind, spasmodic efforts of a mind that all through saw nothing—mistook its own violences and self-wills for eternal right, and was but traitor to what should have been its own first loyalties, in seeking to save and reform. Was true love now to deliver her from that sympathy, to deaden in her that hatred? Her whole soul cried out in denial. By daily life in natural relations with the poor, by a fruitful contact with fact, by the clash of opinion in London, by the influence of a noble friendship, by the education of awakening passion—what had once been mere tawdry and violent hearsay had passed into a true devotion, a true thirst for social good. She had ceased to take a system cut and dried from the Venturists, or any one else; she had ceased to think of whole classes of civilised society with abhorrence and contempt; and there had dawned in her that temper which is in truth implied in all the more majestic conceptions of the State.

(537–38)

We have here—unlike the end of Rose's narrative in *Robert Elsmere*—a full dramatization of the kind of reconciliation with reason Green seems to have imagined as necessary for full autonomy. First, Marcella's motivations have passed into her character. She previously simply thought she should care about the poor, in a haphazard and ill-informed way, but now she has passed from "violent hearsay" to "true devotion," an internalization of the motives involved. Corresponding to this internalization is a recognition of the underlying rationality of the conventions of British society—the "majestic conceptions of the state." But both stem from her newfound ability to love Aldous: far from coming into tension with her love for him, in fact she will be able to sympathize with the poor and hate oppression all the more for her relationship with him.

This is to say that *Marcella* quite clearly reflects a version of Green's theory of autonomy. And it is reasonable to suggest that this is the same trajectory Rose Leyburn is on. But it is striking that this is not how *Robert Elsmere* as a whole ends: In fact, the ending of *Elsmere* is much more tragic, with the successive deaths of Mr. Grey, Squire Wendover, and, finally, Robert himself. And far from ending with a happy marriage, *Elsmere* ends with



Catherine alone and misunderstood in London. What I want to consider now is what reservations about Green's theory that fact suggests.

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It is notable first of all that very few of the protagonists are actually reconciled to Robert's project of the New Brotherhood. The atheistic Squire Wendover, for instance, mocks Robert for founding a new religion, which he sees as just another "vulgar anaesthetic," and insists on dying with his "eyes open" (586; 590). More importantly, Catherine never gives up her Evangelicalism or her hope that Robert will return to full-fledged belief in Christianity. Thus the claim that Robert represents some sort of reconciliation between the individual will and social conventions begins to look somewhat odd: Given that Wendover and Catherine are clearly meant to stand in for certain philosophical positions, it seems troubling that neither finds their reasons acknowledged and included in Elsmere's supposedly evolved position in such a way that they could agree with it. The only place where that reconciliation actually occurs, in other words, appears to be in Robert's own view of himself and his project.

This is in significant contrast to other, more minor characters. When Robert sets up the New Brotherhood in a building in London, he does so with the help of Murray Edwards, a Unitarian minister; a Comtist named Wardlaw; and an open atheist and radical named Lestrangle.<sup>9</sup> These men, it becomes clear, function primarily in the plot to demonstrate the incorporation of the positions they symbolize with Robert's new project. Lestrangle is representative: having begun by pressing Robert in his sermon, he ends up by becoming a passionate leader of the project. "In reality there was no man who worked harder at the New Brotherhood," Ward tells us, "than Lestrangle. He worked under perpetual protest from the frondeur within him, but something stung him on till a habit had been formed which promises to be the joy and salvation of his later life. Was it the haunting memory of that thin figure?" (596). It is particularly telling that Ward insists Lestrangle will be happy—as Green suggested, mere action on the basis of reason is inadequate. For full autonomy, one must incorporate duty into one's identity in such a way that it becomes natural; if Lestrangle is not there yet—he is still working under internal perpetual protest—nevertheless, it is clear he will eventually believe in the work with his whole self. So the question is then this: If these men can be all reconciled with the project, why not Catherine or Wendover? What is it about them that makes the tension unsolvable?

What I want to suggest is that the necessity of inhabiting these subjectivities fully made it less clear to Ward how their concerns, beliefs, and reasons could be incorporated and subsumed. The easy reconciliation with the minor characters, in other words, is made possible precisely because they are minor characters. The difference between Lestrangle's skepticism,



which can be incorporated, and Squire Wendover's skepticism—which cannot—has less to do with the philosophical motivations each has and more to do with the extent to which their lived reality is incorporated into the novel. Once she moved past merely labeling dissident views to actually inhabiting them, Ward found it much less clear how to plausibly reconcile the oppositions involved.

This is particularly clear in the case of Catherine. One of the remarkable features of the novel is how it marks the way Robert's religious transformation coincides with his neglect of her. Indeed, this becomes clear immediately after the novel's climax: when Robert returns home from his transformative meeting with Mr. Grey, Catherine is bitter and angry: Why, she asks, did Robert not tell her what he was going through first? (363). And of course she is right—in fact, Mr Grey has also asked Robert why he has not told his wife about his struggles—and not just because he loves her. After all, as an Anglican clergyman, his religious belief is part of his professional responsibility, and he is in essence quitting his job.

The subsequent conversations, in which Catherine tries to bring Robert back to Christian belief, shows a vivid contrast of the two competing perspectives. On the one hand, Ward presents Elsmere as heroically committed to the truth while still loving his wife: “Another moment and Robert would have lost the only clue which remained to him through the midst of this bewildering world. He would have yielded again [. . .] and have jeopardized love for truth, he would now have murdered [. . .] truth for love. But he did neither” (365). Notably, Ward presents Catherine's requests and arguments as obstacles to which Elsmere must not yield, not partial moral truths that he must acknowledge. On the other hand, Ward is careful to present Catherine's motivations as more than mere convention. In a striking moment, Catherine explains that she is worried in part for their daughter, and worried about what it will be like to try to raise a child in a marriage with such religious difference: “I thought of bringing up the child—how all that was vital to me would be a superstition to you. [. . .] I was agonised by the thought that I was not my own—I and my child were *Christ's*” (373). Indeed, Catherine's courage seems to tell her quite clearly what she needs to do: “Other men and women had died, had given up all for His sake. Is there no one now strong enough to suffer torment, to kill even love itself rather than deny him?” (373). In other words, the ideal Catherine has imagined for herself is hardly reconcilable with what Robert is saying: Perhaps he may think that he has found a version of her religious belief that preserves the genuinely valuable ideals it contains, but that is certainly not how she sees it.

The scene ends with a reconciliation of sorts: Catherine reminds herself that she does love him, and promises that she will live next to him in tolerant but respectful disagreement. However, Ward soon makes it clear that the marriage is severely damaged and the reconciliation one in name only. Importantly, one of the stresses on the relationship is Robert's insistence that she understand him and his work: “He was incessantly possessed with



his old idea that if she *would* allow herself some very ordinary intercourse with his world, her mood would become less strained [. . .] and she might ultimately be able to sympathize with certain sides at any rate of his work” (509). To this end, he invites Wardlaw—the atheist radical—to dinner. The dinner backfires of course, but it does so in an interesting way: when Wardlaw asks Catherine why she does not come to hear Robert preach at the New Brotherhood, she proudly explains that she is “a Churchwoman” and has Sunday school at the same time (511). In other words, the dinner makes public a set of disagreements the couple has been trying to hide as a necessary component of their reconciliation. But, of course, a reconciliation dependent on hiding the points in tension is hardly a meaningful one.

There is a second scene in which Robert and Catherine recommit to each other: The inciting event is that Robert almost falls into an affair on the one hand, while a friend of Robert’s finally explains to Catherine what the New Brotherhood has in fact been doing. This reconciliation bears many of the trappings of the scene at the end of *Marcella*. First of all, Catherine brings herself to say that “God has not one language, but many,” and that she was mistaken in condemning Robert’s version of faith “as no faith” (530). And again, the narrator waxes philosophical in a distinctively Greenian fashion: “Paradise is here, visible and tangible, whenever self is lost in loving, whenever the narrow limits of personality are beaten down by the inrush of the Divine Spirit” (531). In other words, what appears to have happened is precisely the same recognition of the greater rationality in social conventions: Catherine loves Robert, and in moving past herself comes also to recognize the ideals he embodies. But the novel undercuts this possibility almost immediately. She goes to hear Robert preach, but the narrator explains that she is still very much hoping for him to return to her version of Christianity: “Deep in her mystical sense of time lay the belief in a final restoration, in an all-atoning moment, perhaps at the very end of life, in which the blind would see” (532). Even having admitted openly the possibility that God might speak multiple languages, Catherine has not really given up believing that the language she speaks with God is the right one.

This same process is played out again on Robert’s deathbed: Catherine begs him to recognize Christ’s divinity again, and he again refuses—in fact requesting her not to take advantage of his weakness. Again, Ward is pulled to the language of obstacles over shared deliberation: “They had had their last struggle, and once more he had conquered!” (600). In fact, it even continues after Robert’s death: the last two paragraphs of the novel tell the reader that Catherine has continued Robert’s projects but does so without believing in them: “Many were grateful to her; some loved her; none understood her. She lived for one hope only; and the years passed all too slowly” (604). The somber note of Catherine’s end is striking, and it gives the lie to the many seeming reconciliations she had with Robert. While they may have come to various superficial forms of agreement, in fact the deeper tension created by their religious difference was never really healed. If we take



Catherine to symbolize the passionate form of Christianity she so clearly believes in, then the conclusion is a sobering one: Robert's attempt to develop a new form of religious belief that preserved the moral truths in Christianity fails when it comes to those who take those moral truths most seriously. And this leaves the troubling implication that Robert's belief that he really recognized the wisdom of his own cultural conventions was in fact at least slightly self-deception.

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Let me stress in closing that to make this suggestion is clearly to read *Robert Elsmere* against the grain. After all, the novel is dedicated to Green, quotes him approvingly at various moments, and, as we have seen, in fact asserts in the narrator's voice that Catherine and Robert are reconciled in a way Green would recognize. But in the actual depiction of the sort of moral disagreements that are a presumably necessary part of the recognition of the moral truths in conventions and institutions, Ward shows a degree of skepticism the overt mentions of Green do not. Robert and Catherine do not succeed in having shared moral deliberation or reflection; what Ward depicts are in fact emotionally intense power struggles. And victories in these struggles are always temporary: Neither character durably convinces the other of anything. This is all the more striking given that Robert and Catherine love each other, and both recommit several times to valuing each other properly.

I think in some ways this is an inevitable outcome of the basic decision Ward made in the first place: namely, to depict the process of growth and reconciliation Green imagines at an abstract level as a lived exchange between two people in the story of a marriage. The incarnating of social conventions in a particular person—in this case, Catherine's representation of a traditional Christianity—crystallizes the difficulty of understanding, incorporating, and subsuming them in a way that is less immediately apparent when one speaks generally of this process. Catherine wants her husband to go to heaven, and no amount of him explaining his beliefs about moral philosophy has much of an impact on that desire. The fact that her moral beliefs are not susceptible to reason, or indeed really to alteration at all, implies a high degree of skepticism about the kind of reconciliation between the self and society Green claimed was a condition of autonomy. And it seems we might very well ask where exactly that skepticism comes from in Ward's thought, which I hope to have suggested is worth taking seriously.

## Notes

- 1 See Melvin Richter, "T.H. Green and His Audience: Liberalism as a Surrogate Faith," 452–453.
- 2 Ward's own interest in these questions is effectively represented in her lecture "Unitarians and the Future," delivered in 1894.



- 3 The essay is famous for its role in developing the distinction between negative and positive freedom, which Green is sometimes thought to have originated, and which has inspired a significant body of literature in the history of liberalism. See Avital Simhony's "Beyond Negative and Positive Freedom: T. H. Green's View of Freedom" for a good example of this scholarship.
- 4 For a longer discussion of Green's objections to Kant, see David O. Brink (2003), *Perfectionism and the Common Good*, chapter XXVI.
- 5 See Beth Sutton-Ramspeck, "Shot Out of the Canon: Mary Ward and the Claims of Conflicting Feminists."
- 6 A brief history of the Mary Ward Center is available at the organization's website, [www.marywardcentre.ac.uk/history](http://www.marywardcentre.ac.uk/history).
- 7 The term "free indirect discourse" is Dorrit Cohn's: see her *Transparent Minds*.
- 8 As Ward writes, Marcella "never suspected that her presence was often a burden and constraint, not only to the sulky sister-in-law but to the wife herself" (300).
- 9 Named after its founder Auguste Comte, "Comtism" was a 19th-century intellectual movement that aspired to preserve the moral values of religion in a secular humanism.

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# 11 Intersexuality

## Derrida and Cixous

*Hatice Karaman*

The aim of this study is to discuss the concept of autonomy in female authorship. Paradoxically, once the concept is named, what first springs to mind is the very (masculine) Kantian notion of autonomy, and its suggestion of self-legislation, specifically in the area of morality. Kant's basis of morality is defined at its finest in the *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*: "Autonomy of the will is the property of the will through which it is a law to itself (independently of all properties of the objects of volition)" (Kant 2002, 58). The German philosopher builds and develops his moral theory around this central concept, based on the etymological roots of the word: αὐτόνομος. Thus, autonomy presumes a self and it requires free will—a free self. "In its Kantian origins, autonomy is an achievement of Enlightenment" which is the self's coming out of his immaturity (Code 2000, 183). The word αὐτόνομος is not a common one among Ancient Greeks and is not frequently recorded even after its initial occurrence in Sophocles's *Antigone* (McNeill 2011, 412). Even though it was first recorded as an adjective attributed to a female figure in written history, in *Antigone*, "αὐτόνομος" served as one of the major properties of the enlightened "I," which is usually a "he" from the viewpoint of a number of feminist philosophers. For instance, according to Luce Irigaray, the language on which the whole Western history of thought is established is itself masculine, and "the use of the first person pronoun, "I," by women, does not necessarily indicate a feminine identity" (Irigaray 2004, 4). Therefore, "I" does not emerge as αὐτόνομος or as an independent subject. That is, the linguistic problem is one of the major reasons for the subordination of the female sex. The autonomy of women or the "feminine self" is a topic that can be assessed in various ways, which undoubtedly necessitate much broader interrogation and study, not only from a philosophical perspective, but also from a political one. However, within the limits of the present study, I will try to question "textual autonomy" and the position of women in contemporary philosophy. I will do so by focusing on Hélène Cixous's reflections on writing the female self as well as on *écriture féminine* (feminine writing). I will also emphasize the potential relationship between the diminution of authorship and the reappearance of the "feminine" in order to explicate the position of



female writing and thinking via a dialogue between texts by Jacques Derrida and Cixous. Accordingly, I will argue for the idea of intertextuality—which has become more prominent with the rise of postmodernity—as intersexuality via its reference to Cixous’s famous coinage, *sexté* (sext).<sup>1</sup>

## 1. Text, Author, Autonomy

The 1960s were a productive era in theory. Back then, Derrida and Roland Barthes, among many others, published work reflecting on writing and the text.<sup>2</sup> In *The Death of the Author*, Barthes famously claimed that the author is dead as soon as writing begins. Barthes concurs with Mallarmé’s reflections, which actually inspired him. For both of them, in the text, it is not the author who speaks, but the language: “Linguistically, the author is never more than the instance writing, just as I is nothing other than the instance saying I: language knows a “subject,” not a “person,” and this subject, empty outside of the very enunciation which defines it, suffices to make language “hold together,” suffices, that is to say, to exhaust it” (Barthes 1977, 145).

The postmodern text has focused on a perceived (by many philosophers and literary critics) exhaustion of language, on its inability to express and convey meaning, on its inescapable inadequacy, which in its turn reflects on and affects the way we experience reality. This perceived inefficiency of language is situated at the core of Derrida’s groundbreaking albeit controversial theories. Thus, in *Of Grammatology*, Derrida questions the promoted superiority of speech (discourse) over writing in Western metaphysics. In the 1968 essay *Différance*, he confronts the logocentric conception of truth through Saussurean linguistics and, specifically, the signified/signifier dichotomy. Derrida’s interpretation, nevertheless, does not erase author(ship) immediately since even he cannot escape the domination of the text which preserves its significant privileges. “The a of *différance*, therefore is not heard; it remains silent, secret, and discreet, like a tomb. It is a tomb that (provided one knows how to decipher its legend) is not far from signaling the death of the king” (Derrida 2009, 281). The difference obtained via the “a” of *différance* can only be inscribed and realized in writing. Accordingly, the act of uttering itself signifies a representation of the written text.

In 1980, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (2005) published *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, with the clear aim of targeting hierarchies in social organization. In this work, they suggested a rhizomatic model for thinking about history, reality, and literature as a substitute for the tree model that grows out of its roots with hierarchies and substantial order. In the rhizomatic model, they offer a perspective for reconsidering textuality:

There is no longer a tripartite division between a field of reality (the world) and a field of representation (the book) and a field of subjectivity (the author). Rather, an assemblage establishes connections



between certain multiplicities drawn from each of these orders, so that a book has no sequel nor the world as its object nor one or several authors as its subject. In short it has no image, no signification, no subjectivity.

(Deleuze and Guattari 2005, 23)

As the above quotation indicates, they suggested a new reading of both history and literature in which the book or the text is regarded as an assemblage, composed of multiplicities. In the following years, hermeneutics also contributed to the distancing and de-authorization of the author. Paul Ricoeur proposes using the word “discourse” instead of making a distinction between speech and writing. For him, “writing is a process similar to interlocution,” parallel to speech insofar as both utter a discourse (Ricoeur 1973, 97). On the other hand, Ricoeur, recalling Martin Heidegger, also points out that the text is more liberating since it can be distanced not only from its author, but also by

opening up the new dimensions for our being-in-the-world. In this sense, Heidegger rightly says—in his analysis of *verstehen* in *Being and Time*—that what we understand first in discourse is not another person, but a project, that is the outline of a new being-in-the-world. Only writing, in freeing itself, not only from its author, but from the narrowness of the dialogical situation, reveals this destination of discourse as projecting a world.

(Ricoeur 1973, 96)

The idea of a distancing of the author can be discussed more elaborately with regard to the critical theories as well as linguistics and hermeneutics. For the time being, I would like to place my emphasis on the liberating framework, which previous suggestions provide at the textual level with regard to the potentiality of the text for generating a ground for plurality and multiplicity. Next, I will discuss the autonomy of the text along with intertextuality.

## 2. Intertextuality: Bakhtin, Kristeva, Barthes

In *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, which was first published in 1975, Mikhail Bakhtin concentrated on discourse through a conceptualization of the dialogism in prose. He introduced heteroglossia (*raznorecie*) as a representation of diversity in language with its ideological, historical, cultural, and social implications. According to Bakhtin, the novel, as a genre, is the most appropriate locus for the vocalization of this diversity and polyphony. In the novel, the words of the author disappear in the text and they become someone else's. Bakhtin's argument closely resembles Michel Foucault's, who also claimed that: “Writing unfolds like a game (*jeu*) that invariably



goes beyond its own rules and transgresses its limits. In writing, the point is not to manifest or exalt the act of writing, nor is it to pin a subject within language; it is, rather, a question of creating a space into which the writing subject constantly disappears" (Foucault 1998, 206). Due to the "dialogic" and polyphonic structure of discourse in Bakhtinian sense, the text always presupposes allusions, implications, associations, and references:

Only the mythical Adam, who approached a virginal and as yet verbally unqualified world with the first word, could really have escaped from start to finish this dialogic inter-orientation with the alien word that occurs in the object. Concrete historical human discourse does not have this privilege: it can deviate from such inter-orientation only on a conditional basis and only to a certain degree.

(Bakhtin 1981, 279)

In the late sixties, Julia Kristeva also focused on the iterating and interweaving character of language, specifically the text. Her line of argumentation draws its substance from Bakhtin's account, while it also confesses to Derrida's poststructuralist influence. In one of her major essays, "Word, Dialogue, and Novel," Kristeva pays homage to Bakhtin's work:

Bakhtin was one of the first to replace the static hewing out of texts with a model where literary structure does not simply *exist* but is generated in relation to another structure. What allows a dynamic dimension to structuralism is his conception of the "literary word" as an intersection of textual surfaces rather than a point (a fixed meaning), as a dialogue among several writings: that of the writer, the addressee (or the character) and the contemporary or earlier cultural context.

(Kristeva 1986, 35–36)

Kristeva's understanding of intertextuality, which has become prominent in contemporary thinking and theory, is built in interaction with Bakhtin's philosophy and criticism. In her reading of Bakhtin, she points out that "each word (text) is an intersection of word (texts) where at least one other word (text) can be read." (Kristeva 1986, 37) Respectively, she announces that "the notion of intertextuality replaces that of intersubjectivity" (Kristeva 1986, 37). Kristeva's argument gained her Barthes's support, visible in his claim that:

Any text is a new tissue of past citations. Bits of code, formulae, rhythmic models, fragments of social languages, etc., pass into the text and are redistributed within it, for there is always language before and around the text. Intertextuality, the condition of any text whatsoever, cannot, of course, be reduced to a problem of sources or influences; the intertext is a general field of anonymous formulae whose origin can



scarcely ever be located; of unconscious or automatic quotations, given without quotation marks.

(Barthes 1981, 39)

Considering the text as a bricolage, a mosaic, or an assemblage, the author loses authority over the text and the text gains autonomy in its own world. Therefore, the autonomy of each text is gradually formed and it increases at the expense of the author's authority. The text thus has the potential to create its own world. In the world of texts, trapped in constant interactivity and interweaving, the subject succumbs to writing. Consequently, intersubjectivity loses its prominence to and becomes displaced by intertextuality.

### 3. Intersexuality

In difference feminism, authorship (as much as “author”ity) is exclusively identified with masculinity, male-dominance and solid patriarchy. Difference feminism basically conveys the claim of preserving the difference of sexes, rather than reducing femininity and masculinity to equality. From an Irigarayan perspective, the direction of this reduction would be from feminine to masculine, since language itself is patriarchal. Thus, female sexuality is dissolved in masculine culture and politics, since language conditions it. “This accounts for the fact that women find it so difficult to speak and to be heard as women. They are excluded and denied by the patriarchal linguistic order” (Irigaray 2007, 13). The writing “I” in this conventional language cannot form and disclose itself as an autonomous female author. Female sexuality in a masculine culture is postponed and silenced as much as the “a” of difference is lost in speech. The deconstruction of Western metaphysics in conjunction with logocentrism aims at granting some space for femininity, particularly at the level of textuality. In accordance with the decline of the author's possessive power over the text and along with many other socio-cultural grounds, the female writer paradoxically relocates herself in the field of philosophy and in the text.<sup>3</sup>

In this part of this study, I will try to define “intersexuality” vis-à-vis intertextuality as a medium of this relocation. Intertextuality, suggested by Kristeva as a replacement for intersubjectivity, has, without doubt, brought a new perspective to the theory of the text. Yet, considering the text as gendered or in Cixous's terms, as “sext” provides more visibility for the female subject in the world of the text and allows us to rethink intertextuality as “intersexuality.” For this reason, I will focus on Cixous's emphasis on the urgency of women's writing, followed by a discussion of the interactivity of her writing with that of Derrida.

As a woman in a relatively relaxed era in terms of women's rights and opportunities, Cixous makes her own outstanding contribution in her capacity as a philosopher, literary critic, poet, novelist, and dramatist. She is the woman “author” of our age who persuasively requests the presence



of other women in the history of writing (in both literature and philosophy). This invitation from a woman to other women has a momentous meaning, even though women have been writers since ancient times.<sup>4</sup> The invitation to write the feminine self signifies the non-presence of the female author(ity) in history, more specifically in the history of philosophy. In *The Laugh of the Medusa*, arguably her best-known essay, Cixous urges women to write about women, to write about “their” true selves: “Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing” (Cixous 1976, 875).

First of all, Cixous clarifies that, by “woman,” she is referring to the woman who has been struggling against the established figure of man, and a woman subject who should relocate women in history. Cixous points out that this idea of a universal woman subject does not endorse a unity or typicality. For her, one cannot conceive of a female sexuality that is “uniform, homogeneous, classifiable into codes” (Cixous 1976, 876). The diversity, “richness,” and difference of woman’s “individual constitutions” are striking despite the repression carried out by the conventional man (Cixous 1976, 876). Woman’s difference should come into being, by being seen and being heard. The return of woman back into history will be by woman’s writing on woman (Cixous 1976, 878). However, Cixous states the impossibility of defining a “feminine practice of writing since this practice can never be theorized, enclosed, coded—which doesn’t mean that it doesn’t exist” (Cixous 1976, 883). The writing that she proposes will deconstruct the discourse of phallogentrism and cannot be invaded by any authority. Cixous also poses bisexuality against phallic monosexuality. “Bisexuality: that is, each one’s location in self (*répérage en soi*) of the presence—variously manifest and insistent according to each person, male or female—of both sexes, nonexclusion either of the difference or of one sex, and, from “this self-permission”, multiplication of the effects of the inscription of desire, over all parts of my body and the other body” (Cixous 1976, 884).

The bisexuality described here does not repudiate or externalize the differences between the sexes, nor does it require any sort of indifference between them. For Cixous, the repression of woman’s writing and the writing of the woman is parallel to the ignorance and concealing of the female body. The consequence of women failing to rescue their bodies from phallogentric dominance is the lack of texts. Therefore “women must write through their bodies, they must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes, and rhetorics, regulations and codes” (Cixous 1976, 887).

Toril Moi, following Cixous’s ideas, maintains that the female body finds its “voice” in writing, writing through the body, which is not only individual but also the voice of the mother as the “omnipotent figure that dominates the fantasies of the pre-Oedipal baby” (Moi 2002, 112). She also attempts to further elucidate Cixous’s thought (politics-poetics) in her *Sexual/Textual Politics*: “What she describes as some tentative comments turn out to be no less than a lyrical, euphoric evocation of the essential bond between



feminine writing and the mother as source and origin of the voice to be heard in all female texts. [. . .] The voice is the mother and the mother's body" (Moi 2002, 113).

The female body will find itself, its voice in *écriture féminine*—which is a concept suggested by Cixous and is “crucially related to Derrida's analysis of writing as difference” (Moi 2002, 106). While offering such a “gendered” writing or a sexed text, Cixous does not intend to produce another binary opposition such as that between masculine and feminine. Indeed, she posits *écriture féminine* as a bisexual act, which reflects and encourages diversities, marginalities, and differences. According to Cixous, the sex of the author is not identical with the sex of the text or writing. In her 1975 essay *The Newly Born Woman*, the feminine writing will deconstruct the binary oppositions of conventional logos (also logic) such as: activity/passivity, sun/moon, culture/nature, day/night, logos/pathos, man/woman, etc. Consequently, “all the history, all the stories would be there to retell differently; the future will be incalculable; the historic forces would and will change hands and change body—another thought which is yet unthinkable—will transform the functioning of all society” (Cixous 2009, 350). This transformation will start with women writing about women, through writing their bodies, themselves and their sex. That is the significance of Cixous's call achieved with a singular consonant shift: “We're going to show them our sexts!” (Cixous 1976, 885).

In *Sext*, the replacing of the text with a single and silent “taking place” like the “a” of Derrida's *différance*, juxtaposes the feminine body and feminine writing to the meaning(s) of text. It also alters the concept of intertextuality in that it brings a broader definition that contains not only the interplay of texts but also the interplay of sexts. This intersexuality, as I will explicate further on, emerges in the dialogic interactivity between Cixous and Derrida.

#### 4. The Intersections of Texts: Intertexte/Intersexe

To start with, it is necessary to point out that a Derridean trace can be explored through Cixous's thought in general, which almost comes to constitute “a feminist appropriation of Derridean theory” (Moi 2002, 108). Yet, as Moi also points out, Cixous constantly confronts and opposes Derrida: “As we shall see, Cixous's theory is riddled with contradictions: every time a Derridean idea is evoked, it is opposed and undercut by a vision of woman's writing steeped in the very metaphysics of presence she claims she is out to unmask” (Moi 2002, 108).

Despite the differentiating basis, if one is going to speak of a philosophy of Cixous, Derrida's name cannot be easily overlooked. Like her other contemporaries (i.e. Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva), Cixous attacks the binary oppositions and hierarchical structures of the past metaphysics. Her primary tool is, after all, deconstruction. Moi also draws attention to her



deconstructive viewpoint, while emphasizing her self-distinction. Unlike Derrida, Cixous is not bound by the limitations of philosophical discourse but driven by the poetic word (Moi 2002, 118). Cixous herself avoids being called a philosopher, yet she calls Derrida the great philosopher (Cixous 2012, 9). According to Cixous, Derrida's deconstruction of Saussurean linguistics and structuralism provides a significant opportunity to escape from the patriarchal trap of traditional Western metaphysics, more specifically from its language, with a totally new way of writing.

Derrida's analysis undermines and subverts the comforting closure of the binary opposition. Throwing away the field of signification wide open, writing—textuality—acknowledges the free play of the signifier and breaks open what Cixous perceives as the prison-house of patriarchal language.

(Moi 2002, 106)

Cixous highly respects the genius and the sublimity of Derrida's line of thought, his love of the word and the language, as well as of poetry:

A genius in him guides the blind man he is, unerringly guides his hand, his beak, his quill, his stylus, his syringe towards the worm [*vers le ver*] or the *vein*. He learns a text by ear, hears the secret cry of a being of language. Besides, he only likes texts, works, corpuses which have the word, which sign, which conceal yet leave traces of the keys, which have well-kept secrets. With the word does his reading begin, that is to say, his encounter and his acknowledgement [. . .] He takes the words of a language, he takes a language, that is to say, a soul, an idiom within an idiom, at its words. It is the principle.

(Cixous 2012, 3)

It is not only Cixous who responds positively to the other's writing. The appreciation is mutual. In his opening talk for the symposium *Hélène Cixous: Genesis Genealogies Genres*, Derrida discusses the ideas of genius and secret in dialogue with Cixous's literary and theoretical work. Derrida points out that despite the ever-singular use of the word genius, Cixous is the first to introduce the plurality of geniuses in terms of recognizing the geniuses of a woman: "Never would we say that she is or she has, in the plural, more than one kind of genius [*plus d'une genie*]. The historical, semantic and practical singularity of this noun is therefore such that we have always kept it for the masculine as well as the singular. One has never, to my knowledge, recognized, in the feminine, the geniuses of a woman" (Derrida 2006, 5).

In addition, Derrida attributes a plurality of geniuses to Cixous herself. For him, Cixous has many geniuses in all genres of writing, within literature and its secrecy. Cixous has produced various texts including novels and plays as well as critical and theoretical texts in her poetic language.



Furthermore, she has managed to bring all genres, together, with none losing their particularity. According to Derrida, in Cixous's art of poetry we can distinguish: "The graft, the hybridisation, the migration, the genetic mutation [is] multiplied and cancels out differences of genre, gender, the literary and sexual differences. In the bisexual writing of Cixous, each genre remains itself, at home, while generously offering hospitality to the other genre, to all sorts of others" (Derrida 2006, 19).

*Veils*, the co-authored publication of Derrida and Cixous, is another example of the textual interaction between the two authors. It is composed of two parts. The first part is written by Cixous and is entitled *Savoir*. The second part is written by Derrida, and it is a detailed reflection on the story told in the first part as much as a response to Cixous's experience and storytelling. *Savoir* is an autobiographical story, a confession of her myopia and its uncommon cure. In this story, she tells the experience of seeing without any prosthesis, through the naked eye after the uplifting of her "native veil" (Cixous and Derrida 2001, 3). Through the acts of perception and imperception, Cixous describes her intuitive account, stressing the I or/and the self as much as the dichotomy of subject and object: "She had just touched the world with her eye, and she thought: "it is I who can see." I would thus be my eyes. I the encounter, the meeting point between my seeing soul and you?" (Cixous and Derrida 2001, 9).

Derrida's section of the book is entitled *A Silkworm of One's Own: Points of View Stitched on the Other Veil*. Obviously recalling Virginia Woolf's masterpiece, *A Room of One's Own*, Derrida's text starts with an epigraph from St. Augustine *Sero te amavi* (So late have I loved thee) which mirrors Cixous's feeling of loss and longing once the myopia is gone, realizing she has lost her native veil forever: "Now at last I can love my myopia, that gift in reverse, I can love it because it is going to come to an end" (Cixous and Derrida 2001, 11).

In "A Silkworm of One's Own," Derrida writes his reflections on *Savoir* around the idea of veiling, and this writing takes him to religious, cultural, and even Freudian argumentations. The true story of his friend reveals a secret to Derrida, the secret myopia or the veil that Cixous had kept for herself. He is obviously inspired by the unveiling experience of Cixous and her text when he asks the question: "Will we still recount an eye operation as a story of veils?" (Cixous and Derrida 2001, 34) and, playing with the ideas of veiling and unveiling, as well as playing with "Savoir," he continues:

The author of *Savoir* often talks of a miracle, because what is extraordinary here touches on seeing a marvel of the eye produced by technoscience, but, by allowing seeing in her, Helene Cixous, at the basis of the joy of her seeing, at the heart of her vision come about but not come back (for it was not there before), there is mourning. At the base of the eye restored, mourning. We have to learn from her: a knowing and a



piece of news: learn from her that the vision of seeing, her seeing, her vision, was from the start in mourning of the unseen. This operation had to be paid for by a loss. This operation thus engenders the opus, that is, the poem that was born of it and here beats its wings. This celebration poem allows a song of mourning to throb in it—and the party a lament.

(Cixous and Derrida 2001, 50)

As a contemporary of Cixous, Irigaray, who severely criticizes the tradition of psychoanalysis (specifically Freud and Lacan), claims that the oedipal nature of masculine subjectivity is established via the objectification of the feminine. She also puts forward that the language we use is radically masculine, rendering the emergence of an autonomous female self impossible. Therefore, Western culture is patriarchal as a whole, and the alternative can only be possible by transforming the language and the codes of the existing cultural order: “Societies other than patriarchal ones correlate to traditions in which there is a female cultural order, transmitted from mothers to daughters” (Irigaray 2007, 9). Irigaray recalls the ancient myth of the goddess Hestia, relating the name with being, and dwelling on its etymological signification referred to in Heidegger’s philosophy: “Being and dwelling are related to the name of Hestia, the female divinity who guarded the flame of the domestic hearth. The divine is therefore watched over by the woman at home. It is transmitted from mother to daughter” (Irigaray 2007, 11). Irigaray emphasizes that the significance of goddesses such as Hestia has intentionally been forgotten while gods have always been spoken of. “This led to a break with female genealogy” (Irigaray 2007, 11). In Cixous’s bisexual writing (or *écriture féminine*) not only Cixous as a female author, but also Derrida is re-located in a female genealogy.

In order to be more specific and illustrate my proposed concept of “intersexuality,” I will also suggest an intersexual reading of *Portrait of Jacques Derrida as a Young Jewish Saint* by Cixous. *Portrait* is both a biographical and an intertextual work, which dwells on Derrida’s relationship with his mother. Although it does not depict a mother-daughter genealogy, it provides an account of a mother-son connection and its reflections on the philosopher. In this work, Cixous presents her reading of Derrida’s *Circumfession* where he writes about his mother, juxtaposing his existence with his mother’s from the beginning in the foreword: “He is born between two deaths. Between two dead sons-of-the mother. He is (born), he exists only between two deaths. Literature—that he is—lives on in place of the son of Esther-Amnesia” (Cixous 2004). Obviously, Cixous is not exaggerating the significance of the bond between the son and his mother when she attempts to portray him. In *Circumfession*, Derrida himself questions being called and being recognized by his mother while she was suffering from amnesia in her final days:



Still alive at the moment I am writing this, but already incapable of memory of my name, a name become for her at the very least unpronounceable, and I am writing here at the moment when my mother no longer recognizes me, and at which she no longer calls me and for her and therefore for the rest of her life I no longer have a name, that's what's happening, and when she nonetheless replies to me, she is presumably replying to someone who happens to be me without her knowing it, if knowing means anything here.

(Derrida and Bennington 1999, 22)

Cixous captures Derrida's bond with his mother very clearly and rewrites it in *Portrait*, translating and transferring it into her *écriture féminine*:

What *Circumfession* says is that: the labor with the mother on the edge of the mother around the mother, turning around the bed, staying close to her shore, is a labor on and with sexuality. Therefore it is the time of the origin of sexual life, and the time of end: we all live because the mother inscribes the beginning and the end for us, not taking milestones into account, not taking boundaries and limits into account. One cannot take the dates of birth and death into account but the mother overflows these banks, we are in her, she is in us; wherever the period falls, infinity remains.

(Cixous 2004, 55)

In the case of Derrida, the mother has always been there, she has been the one who has engendered him and his philosophy (Cixous 2004, 38). The mother is inseparable from the son; therefore the masculine is inseparable from the feminine. In Cixous's writing about Derrida's writing about his mother Esther, the difference of sexes becomes visible and none of those annuls the other. The bisexual nature of the text/sext allows the female author's being (heard), even when the author of the text is male. The (sexual) authority of the author loses significance as soon as the text is engendered bisexually. Cixous signals this more profoundly when she emphasizes Derrida's secret Hebrew name: "And so he was Elie, one or other of the Elies, male, female, each and every one of the Elies, and unaware of it. But Elie knew he was Elie. The Elect. Elie, in French" (Cixous 2004, 15). Through reading and rewriting Derrida's text, Cixous manages to relocate the femininity of the masculine, which is diminished by patriarchal culture, especially by psychoanalysis: "Psychoanalysis is formed on the basis of woman and has repressed (not all that successfully) the femininity of masculine sexuality" (Cixous 2009, 352). Writing as a woman, as a female-self, opens the path for representing not only the self, but also the other. For Cixous, it is "the passageway, the entrance, the exit, the dwelling place of the other" (Cixous 2009, 352).



Through writing, Cixous not only relocates Derrida in femininity, but also allows the bisexual other to dwell in her writing. It is my contention that this is how intertextuality can be reconsidered as intersexuality, when the text becomes the (bisexual) sext. Cixous writes pages, books on Derrida's writing while she is writing herself, women, and men. There is no authority of the author in the sext. Yet each and every identity an author carries—the major as well as the peripheral ones—can be read in any text that is freed from patriarchal codes. Therefore, one can hear Cixous speaking in Derrida's writing, and Derrida speaking in Cixous's writing. *The Death of the Author* procreates more authors without possession over the text, but with the power to multiply and transform. The author does not govern the text, however, exists in it in interaction with other texts and other authors. Once the author's possession of the text is reduced, the author(s) permeate in writing:

Writing is working; being worked; questioning (in) the between (letting oneself be questioned) of same *and of* other without which nothing lives; undoing death's work by willing the togetherness of one-another, infinitely charged with a ceaseless ex-change of one with another—not knowing one another and beginning again only from what is most distant, from self, from other, from the other within. A course that multiplies transformations by the thousands.

(Cixous 2009, 353)

The text is supposed to be bisexual in feminine writing. It should assess and be assessed along with many other texts produced by many other authors and selves with its capacity to change and represent change. The multiplicity of voices in the sext is what brings Derrida to the recognition of the geniuses in the feminine, in Cixous: "I know of no more impressive and admirable example in the world of this kind of complicity. Hélène Cixous's indefatigable and unique translation of the infinite world, of all possible worlds of the nocturnal dream, into the incomparable vigilance of one of the most calculating of diurnal writings" (Derrida 2006, 23). The bisexual text, or the sexed text when considered together with intertextuality, evolves itself as intersexuality. Intersexuality, as the interaction among sexts might be capable of providing a more pluralistic discourse. In its minimum capacity, intersexuality helps revealing not only the existence of female authorship, but also its prominent differences, without reducing the other sex into sameness. At this textual level, it might be possible to speak of a genuine female autonomy that has not been conditioned by the masculine "I." In other words, from a theoretical perspective of the sexed text and intersexuality, female autonomy might be more exuberant, when the "I" is extricated from its paternal associations in feminine writing. The non-hierarchical interactivity in intersexuality will relocate the I-she in the cultural history against



the cultural amnesia that has eliminated all maternal and feminine genealogy from the histories of both mythos and logos.<sup>5</sup>

## Conclusion

The examples regarding the interaction of the two writers' texts could be multiplied as well as the investigation into the philosophical parallelisms and relations. In this context, the study argues for intertextuality becoming intersexuality and explores its role in relocating the woman writer in the world of the text or philosophy. As discussed in the accounts of Derrida and Cixous, the deconstructive character of thinking and writing in contemporary philosophy disempowers the masculine author(ity) together with author(ship). The dialogic relationship, or intertextuality, among the texts has the potential to enable the conjunction of feminine and masculine writing without unification. The more the text gains autonomy and is liberated from its author, the more space is available for the voice of the other. The Text (sext) cannot be isolated from the writer. However, the diminution of authorship and the attribution of a certain level of authority to the text allows for interpretations, re-readings, and re-contextualization.<sup>6</sup> In this way, the text gets into dialogue with many other subjects than the writing subject. Therefore, the author-subject is also multiplied. Cixous's analysis of Derrida's *Specters of Marx* offers a terrific example of such multiplicity and therefore intertextuality: *Shakespeare Ghosting Derrida*. In this essay, she points out that Derrida is not just writing on Marx in constant interaction with Shakespeare, Joyce, Nietzsche, Freud, and others, but he is also writing himself, about himself, as the following quotation indicates:

The "great philosopher" Jacques Derrida proceeds like the "great philosopher" whom Nietzsche speaks about in *Beyond Good and Evil*. One must read, says Nietzsche, says Jacques Derrida, the "great philosophers" *umgekehrt*, in the back, from the back, from behind, above their backs, backwards. Each great philosophy will have been in a way the confession of its author and a kind of involuntary memoir. When a great philosopher (let's say Nietzsche, let's say Jacques Derrida in Nietzsche's back therefore) produces a great philosophy, he writes his "memoirs" in secret. By saying "great philosophy," Nietzsche suggests, Jacques Derrida suggests in his back, that only the great philosophies are autobiographical testimonies. Mediocre philosophers talk only of philosophy. Paradoxically *great philosophies* are *great* because they *give away* their signature.

(Cixous 2012, 9)

It is via these intertexts that the text becomes an assemblage, an "interbeing" without necessary or substantial roots, and opens space for the other. Cixous's call for feminine or bisexual writing not only appeals to female



authors, but also to male authors whose femininity is mostly diminished. It attempts to contain and embrace the other in masculinity, as much as the other in femininity. From a non-hierarchical point of view, the text as an assemblage becomes the medium for a dialogue among different authors. As soon as the assemblage text becomes sext, it achieves its highest capacity to reflect and orchestrate multiplicities and diversities. The multiplicity of selves become audible once the author's engrossing influence degrades. Being liberated from the dominance of authorship, the autonomous text/sext also liberates its author, other authors, and other selves. Cixous urges women to write; she believes that it will be a manifestation of the existence of an "other." Intersexts, at this point, increase the capacity of the sext in terms of disclosing the identity of the other sex, not as a reduced alterity but as a different, sexed writing subject. As long as women keep writing on themselves, on other selves, the veils of history will be lifted, illuminating more and more female selves and authors.

## Notes

- 1 Cixous 1976, 885.
- 2 In the 1969 Lecture *What Is an Author?*, Michel Foucault argues for anonymity and devaluates authorship in the frame of the questions to be asked on a text: "What are the modes of existence of this discourse? Where has it been used, how can it circulate, and who can appropriate it for himself? What are the places in it where there is room for possible subjects? Who can assume these various subject functions? And behind all these questions, we would hear hardly anything but the stirring of an indifference: What difference does it make who is speaking?" (Foucault 1998, 222).
- 3 The paradox derives from the decline of authorship and autonomy of the text, which, at the same time allows the female writer to become more visible.
- 4 I.e. Hypatia of Alexandria, Émilie du Châtelet, Olympe de Gouges, etc.
- 5 It might be beneficial to recall Umberto Eco's discussion of overinterpretation in his Tanner Lectures (1990). The idea of a pure reader-response theory is open to many controversies. In the present study, the decline of the authority of the author is strictly used for the purpose of demonstrating how it would enable another, "sexed" conception of authorship.
- 6 In *Je, Tu, Nous* Irigaray explains that "she" has been reduced to a "not-he" through the neglecting of maternal genealogy and cultural amnesia, which has been constructed by the patriarchal culture.

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# 12 Responsibility and Involvement: Judith Jarvis Thomson's Justification of Abortion

*Daniela Ringkamp*

## Introduction

Referencing different autonomy concepts is a key decision-making strategy in medical ethics. Autonomy is one of the principles Beauchamp and Childress regard as binding in every interaction between medical professionals and patients (Beauchamp and Childress 2001, 12).<sup>1</sup> Notions of autonomy confirm the diversity and complexity of medical emergencies and see application in mediating situations in which patient autonomy either prevails by rejecting medical measures or other, more advanced concepts of self-determination enter the picture. Legitimizing active euthanasia, for example, not only concerns the moral concepts of the person seeking it but also influences decisions that medical professionals make respecting their own values and ideas.

In this context, abortion is an especially urgent issue, since—unlike questions about the morality of euthanasia—it directly involves the fates of two human beings that are physically connected in a most intimate way. It is, of course, the pregnant woman who, unlike the embryo or fetus, cognizes this connection, is fully aware of her status, and experiences the physical circumstances of pregnancy in her body. This intimate “situation,” more than any other, concerns medical ethics in general and reproductive medicine in particular, as in pre-implantation diagnostic procedures that intervene outside the woman’s body. During a pregnancy, however, since it implies the existence of an unborn child physically linked to the mother and thus of a being whose moral status must also be taken into account, a woman’s self-determination would seem to be constrained by the child’s existence: Even if she decides to abort the unborn child, she could do so only while fully cognizant of the child’s existence. It is therefore not in the least surprising that questions on the legitimacy of abortion have arisen to become a key topic in medical ethics since the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s, or, for that matter, that women themselves to a large extent have driven the philosophical debates on abortion.

One of the most important contributors to this discussion is Judith Jarvis Thomson, whose so-called violinist analogy has become a leading thought



experiment employed in philosophical arguments. In “A defense of abortion,” first published in 1971 in *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, Thomson argues for an expansive right of self-determination for women in controlling their own bodies. Her thought experiment of the violinist analogy is a main conceptual element in her justification of abortion. The experiment has been widely debated by proponents and opponents of her position and continues to play an important role in the current debates. This is the analogy’s basic version:

You wake up in the morning and find yourself back in bed with an unconscious violinist. A famous unconscious violinist. He has been found to have a fatal kidney ailment, and the Society of Music Lovers has canvassed all the available medical records and found that you alone have the right blood type to help. They have therefore kidnapped you, and last night the violinist’s circulatory system was plugged into yours, so that your kidneys can be used to extract poisons from his blood as well as your own. The director of the hospital now tells you, “Look, we’re sorry the Society of Music Lovers did this to you—we would never have permitted it if we had known. But still, they did it, and the violinist now is plugged into you. To unplug you would be to kill him. But never mind, it’s only for nine months. By then he will have recovered from his ailment, and can safely be unplugged from you.” Is it morally incumbent on you to accede to this situation?

(Thomson 1971, 48–49)

In Thomson’s text, this experiment is qualified in various ways, some of which I will discuss below. Its thrust, however, is clear: pregnancy is (or under some circumstances) could be seen as a fundamental threat to a woman’s self-interest, just as plugging the violin player into the circulatory system of the person in the experiment is. Since this person cannot be forced to save the violinist’s life, it may be permissible to kill the musician by unplugging him.<sup>2</sup> By analogy, a woman may thus also be justified in terminating an unwanted pregnancy, even if this results in the death of the unborn child. Hence, Thomson is generally characterized as viewing abortion as a kind of self-defense by the pregnant woman that emphasizes her autonomy and right to control her own body.

In my contribution, I will address the concept of autonomy implied by Thomson’s account and analyze its various versions in terms of the responsibility position and the involvement position. Each position’s approach is informed by a different concept of autonomy. Proponents of the responsibility position adduce causal grounds to insist that a woman should give birth if the pregnancy results from a consensual sexual act: She and her partner, as autonomous individuals, caused the pregnancy and are therefore responsible for the child. If the woman aborts, she abdicates her responsibility for the child’s life. The involvement position on the contrary holds that



the pregnant woman's right to physical autonomy arises out of the intimate physical situation prevailing with every pregnancy. This situation frequently is described as a relationship of physical closeness between mother and fetus in several dimensions. On the one hand, the impossibility of separating mother and fetus during pregnancy informs approaches grounded in a dissolution of the physical boundaries between subject and object, implying the pregnant woman's special awareness of the child's needs to the point where they merge with her own.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, the physical dimension of pregnancy nonetheless continues to be an asymmetric relationship between mother and child that is unlike any other physical condition. Considering pregnancy as an asymmetric relationship, in which the existence of the fetus makes claims for fundamental changes in the woman's life that extend far beyond the duration of pregnancy, makes room for a different understanding of a woman's autonomy during pregnancy. Central to this perspective is a pregnant woman's experience of her body as a deeply private matter. She is the one most affected physically by the pregnancy and carries the "burden of providing fetal life-support" (Davis 1984, 200). Discerning these fundamental implications of pregnancy may lead to different perspectives on justifying abortions. In my contribution, I emphasize this perspective by relating Thomson's approach to the views of Nancy Davis, Jeff McMahan, Ronald Dworkin, and F. M. Kamm. I show that Thomson does *not* respond to the responsibility position adequately, but that she gives cogent reasons for appreciating the involvement position. Adducing the physical implications of pregnancy, as the involvement position does, is essential for an examination of abortion in the medical ethics context. In the first part of my paper, I will highlight the aspects of Thomson's analogy bearing on my argument. In the second part, I will outline the implications of the responsibility objection and the involvement position by applying them to Thomson's thought experiment. In the third part, I will conclude with a justification of abortion based on the involvement position. I will argue that a woman may indeed have a certain responsibility to see pregnancy to term but that it is not decisive: the involvement position, which focuses on the special physical situation represented by pregnancy, preempts it.

## Initial Comments

The controversial, even provocative, aspect of Thomson's approach, which helps to explain the harsh reactions of some of her opponents, rests on the assumption the violinist analogy makes that abortion is permitted despite the fetus being regarded as a person with full moral rights. This assumption does not express Thomson's own viewpoint: Rather, her critics construe the analogy in this way for the sake of the argument and to skew it to their own views (Thomson 1971, 48). Just like the violinist has the right to life, enforced by the Society of Music Lovers, so does a fetus, the formal argument being: every person has the right to life, the fetus is a person; therefore,



it has the right to life.<sup>4</sup> It is important to parse how this assumption builds a symmetrical relation between mother and fetus on a *moral* level that does not mirror the asymmetrical *biological* relationship between them. Here, we already see a prominent methodological feature of Thomson's approach in how she splits levels of argumentation: biological facts are contrasted with normative aspects, and the normative role of taking responsibility for one's actions is differentiated from causal connections. This separation of the normative and the descriptive, the biological or causal components burdens Thomson's position. By predominantly considering normative assumptions as such, Thomson does not adequately consider the normative implications of causal facts. This leads her to misinterpret responsibility; moreover, it causes her to ignore the meaning of the physical implications expressed by the violinist analogy. I will return to this issue later.

Besides drawing attention to this methodological problem, which directly impacts Thomson's stance, let me also note that, for the sake of the argument, I will not discuss situations in which abortions are less controversial. I take it as a given that abortion is justified in cases of medical necessity, in which seeing the pregnancy to term would put the mother's physical and/or mental health at risk. Similarly, I will accept that abortion is justified if the pregnancy results from sexual assault against the woman or—more controversially—if the child is terminally ill or seriously disabled. Of course, all these aspects should be justified case by case on their merits. Thomson herself is very careful to give reasons, especially for the first and second eventualities. Specifically, it is not at all clear throughout whether Thomson develops her position on justified abortions solely for women who are victims of rape. However, I think that there are good reasons to regard her position, for example, as Singer does (Singer 1993, 147), as valid *not only* for cases of sexual violence. I will substantiate this claim in the second part of the paper. Thus, the initial problem addressed in my paper is whether abortion is justified in the absence of a health risk for the mother, when the unborn child is healthy, and the pregnancy did not result from sexual abuse. My argument contemplates a situation in which the woman leads a balanced individual, social, and economic life, she and her partners adopted conventional measures to prevent a pregnancy; in brief, the pregnancy is solely the unintended, unwanted result of a consensual sexual act.

### Thomson on Abortion, Self-Defense, and Responsibility

To analyze the justification for an abortion in a case like the one just described, Thomson introduces another version of her thought experiment. For the violinist analogy does not apply in this case, since there is a key difference between the violinist and the fetus: The woman in the violinist analogy did not *cause* the situation, whereas in the other case, she, together with her partner, by their action, did just that, with the result of an unexpected



and unwanted pregnancy. The pair should have factored in the risk of pregnancy that exists even when using contraceptives. Thomson illustrates this situation with the following analogy:

[S]uppose it was like this: people-seeds drift about in the air like pollen, and if you open your windows, one may drift in and take root in your carpets or upholstery. You don't want children, so you fix up your windows with fine mesh screens, the very best you can buy. As can happen, however, and on very, very rare occasions does happen, one of the screens is defective, and a seed drifts in and takes root. Does the person-plant that now develops have a right to the use of your house? Surely not—despite the fact that you voluntarily opened your windows, you knowingly kept carpets and upholstered furniture, and you knew that screens were sometimes defective.

(Thomson 1971, 59)<sup>5</sup>

To put her argument in stark terms, given that the invasion by the seeds/ the fetus was unwanted, it would be inappropriate and even absurd to grant a seed/ fetus the right to enter and grow in your room/body. Therefore, destroying the developing plant/child is justified.

Against this argument, many of Thomson's critics marshal the so-called *responsibility objection*, which links causation, intention, and responsibility.<sup>6</sup> According to this view, individuals capable of exercising free will must take responsibility for the consequences of their actions, whether arising directly, indirectly or as calculable side-effects. Action normally implies that an individual has certain capacities that it can freely exercise, but this autonomy also brings with it taking responsibility for consequences. Clearly, according to this view, a woman and her partner who cause a pregnancy should take responsibility for the child's existence:

The crucial difference between a pregnancy due to rape and the normal case of an unwanted pregnancy is that in the normal case we cannot claim that the woman is in no way responsible for her predicament; she could have remained chaste, or taken her pills more faithfully or abstained on dangerous days and so on.

(Warren 1973, 49)

Unlike in cases of sexual abuse, prohibiting abortion in this context does *not* violate a pregnant woman's autonomy, but indeed supports it. The woman, as an autonomous being, could have foreseen the possibility of a pregnancy as a side effect of sexual acts despite having sought to prevent it in advance. Bringing a being with full moral rights into existence requires taking responsibility for it and keeping it alive (Warren 1973, 50).

Thomson counters this objection by formulating a different understanding of responsibility not based on causal aspects but on volitional, intentional



acts. In her paper's conclusion, she takes up the connection between responsibility and an unintended pregnancy as follows:

But if they [the parents, D. R.] have taken all reasonable precautions against having a child, they do not simply by virtue of their biological relationship to the child who comes into existence have a special responsibility for it. They may wish to assume responsibility for it, or they may not wish to. And I am suggesting that if assuming responsibility for it would require large sacrifices, then they may refuse.

(Thomson 1971, 65)

Left entirely unclear here is how large a sacrifice must be to justify choosing not to have the child—this is one of the ambiguities in Thomson's position.<sup>7</sup> What matters more for Thomson is that assuming responsibility depends on a kind of intention or manifestation of an actor's will as a norm-giving standard.<sup>8</sup> The question of causation, as discussed earlier, seems to be of little importance: if the actors—in this case the parents—have shown their willingness to care for the child, they are responsible for the child's well-being. But if taking responsibility would require large sacrifices (however defined), they are justified in rejecting it. Again, the pregnant woman's autonomy (and here also the father's) has priority. The distinction between the causal explanations of responsibility and those that rely directly on normative aspects now becomes obvious: for Thomson, the biological ties with the unborn child do not suffice for grounding responsibility; how the parents evaluate the situation is of the essence. The normative question of being responsible for an action's consequences therefore correlates with the actors' internal attitudes and preferences, which are a sufficient basis for ascribing responsibility. This reference to evaluative attitudes shifts the symmetric relationship established between mother and unborn child when the fetus is perceived as a moral agent with the same right to life as any other born person. To justify abortion, Thomson's reasoning relies on normative elements, which let her model this symmetric relationship at the expense of the fetus:<sup>9</sup> making the right to life of the fetus the decisive factor would indeed severely limit the grounds for evaluating the legitimacy of abortion. But, is it convincing when Thomson examines responsibility relationships merely on a normative level while ignoring causal relationships?

Indeed, if the only decisive factor was the actor's will and not that the actor caused a certain outcome, many alternatives for assigning responsibility for an act would be excluded. Even if a woman rejects responsibility, she may nevertheless still be held accountable, as is easily demonstrated by many examples from other areas of applied ethics. For example, in discussions about reducing severe poverty, some argue for compensation from global corporations that—directly or indirectly—caused poverty. Here, it would be absurd to bind the attribution of responsibility to the perpetrator's consent. If a corporate polluter's actions force a population to relocate,



the corporation must pay compensation to those it injured, regardless of whether the pollution was *intentional* or an unintended, unanticipated side-effect.<sup>10</sup> That said, in some situations there are, of course, limits to liability, such as when the individual is pathologically incapable of taking autonomous actions or calculating potential side effect. Under normal circumstances, however, the principal factor remains the causal relationship between an individual's actions and their consequences. Whether these are intended or not is a secondary question, which can only be inferred from the causal explanation of an action.<sup>11</sup> Being responsible is not just a question of the individual accepting responsibility voluntarily, but is something a neutral observer would likely ascribe by attributing the consequences of actions to specific agents and by weighing how intention, causation, and the actual outcomes of an action are related. It suffices to assert that an actor can be held responsible even though the outcome of the action an individual is responsible for was *not* in the least intended. This reasoning changes the perspective on Thomson's argument: If an action's intent does not matter as much as its actual causation, she cannot use the unintended character of the pregnancy as a valid reason for justifying an abortion. Furthermore, if the causal relationship and not the actor's intention is key to ascribing responsibility, Thomson cannot reject the responsibility objection that a woman is responsible for the unborn child's life because she (and her partner) have caused its existence.<sup>12</sup> Even if the pregnancy was in no way intended and contraception has been used, the couple should have calculated the risk of an improbable yet still possible consequence of their sexual act. As Jeff McMahan states, "[T]here is a basis for parental relationship that is nonvoluntary" (McMahan 2002, 374). For McMahan, this non-voluntary basis resides not only in the child's need for support but also in the genetic relationship:

Because both dimensions of the parent-child relationship are present in the relationship between a pregnant woman and her fetus when the pregnancy is the result of voluntary sex, and given that we are assuming that the fetus has a moral status no different from that of a child, it is reasonable to conclude that these factors give the woman a special reason, though not necessarily a decisive one, to support the fetus.

(McMahan 2002, 377)

To summarize, abortion cannot be justified by reference to the violinist or the seeds analogies if they are read as symbolizing causal relationships between mother and fetus. Since the parents have caused the pregnancy, intentionally or not, they are responsible for the child's well-being and this makes abortion illegitimate. If the analogy is to serve as a substantive argument for abortion, it needs a different interpretation. This different perspective can be gained by considering the corporal relationship between the woman and the violinist/fetus depicted in the analogy. I now turn to an analysis of this



relationship by considering the involvement position, a concept that focuses on the physical integrity of both mother and child.

### **Pregnancy, Involvement, and Women's Autonomy**

The violinist analogy is confusing in that it sets up an asymmetric relation on a biological level between woman and violin player but then abandons this asymmetry on a moral level by treating the fetus as a person with full moral rights. This raises the question why the analogy is even necessary. Thomson's aim is to show that even if the fetus is regarded as a person with moral rights, the woman is not obligated to respect the fetus' right to life. Aside from the fact that a person's right to life does not per se correlate with someone's duty to fulfill this right, being responsible for someone presupposes an individual's willingness to accept her duty to and responsibility for the rights of others. Indeed, Thomson's strategy of assuming volitional attitudes as a basic condition for responsibility does *not* require a corporal connection between the persons concerned as in the violinist analogy. Beyond this, as shown earlier, the strategy fails because it disregards the importance of causal relations in ascribing responsibility to an actor.

### **Abortion and the Involvement Position**

An entirely different perspective on the thought experiment results if we focus on the relation between woman and violin player/fetus on a descriptive level, which, in the first instance, excludes normative interpretations concerning the moral status of the fetus. The relationship between the woman and the violin player in the thought experiment is deeply asymmetrical: the violin player's survival depends on his being hooked up to the woman's circulatory system, whereas the woman could survive entirely without it. As the unborn child is not connected to the woman's body from outside but is carried in her womb, pregnancy constitutes an even more asymmetric relationship. Nancy Davis describes it as follows:

[A] fetus thus survives off a woman (that is, at her expense), not in partnership with her. Since the life and well-being of the fetus are sustained through its physical dependence on the woman's body, the very fact of being pregnant undermines a woman's autonomy. She cannot choose what she shall do without thereby choosing for someone else, and she must therefore take into account the possible risks of even the most mundane sorts of activities: driving a car, lifting a bucket, taking an aspirin. While providing assistance to a post-fetal person may involve a significant reduction of a benefactor's freedom of choice and action, pregnancy involves a physical invasion of the body. A pregnant woman is thus not in the position of someone who is (merely) reluctantly providing a time-consuming and exhausting



service to another person. Nor is she (merely) in the position of someone whose body is regarded by others as a resource of the community, in the way that the possessor of a rare blood type might be so regarded in an emergency, or the possessor of two healthy kidneys might be in a society beset by hereditary kidney disease. Pregnancy is, by its nature, a more intimate invasion, for it modifies a woman's *self*: it takes *her* over by hormonal alteration, as well as in more subtle ways.

(Davis 1984, 201)

Here Davis contradicts approaches that treat pregnancy as a situation of unity and integration between mother and fetus. What such approaches overlook, however, is that, on an *ontological* level, there indeed does exist a deep asymmetry between mother and unborn child, which, in a second step, may be emotionally transformed by the mother into an integral relationship of physical unity.

Unlike Davis (Davis 1984, 179), I will not take up the question here of whether the fetus could in fact be regarded as a parasite. Instead, I will advocate for a perspective that considers the fundamental changes precipitated by pregnancy as a physical state. Davis depicts these changes as drastically transforming a woman's thoughts and feelings by hormonal alteration to the point where they may even modify a pregnant woman's self—her attitudes, her self-perception, and interactions with her social environment. I would like to suggest that these changes may be so profound as to furnish a sufficient justification for terminating the pregnancy—that of preserving one's former self.

However, this compels us to ask what is implied by assuming that pregnancy changes a woman's self. In her reflection on the naturalness of pregnancy, F. M. Kamm points to an important difference between a pregnant woman and the woman who is hooked up to the violin player. The woman in the thought experiment is frustrated and angered by being in this state. But, is this necessarily the case with a pregnant woman? In pregnancy, physical and hormonal changes may influence the woman developing a positive attitude toward her condition, even if the pregnancy was not intended. This natural process

is more likely to result not only in an immense physical transformation of the woman—as evidence of the fact that her body is serving the needs of someone other than herself—but also in an immense psychological transformation: Her biology may pull her toward psychological identification with the fetus, and the boundaries of her ego dissolve with respect to it. Further, because pregnancy is a natural process, a form of pleasure is likely to accompany this quasi-dissolution of the individual into an instrument for the ends of nature.

(Kamm 1992, 102)



It is important to realize, however, that a woman not wanting to becoming pregnant may reject this potential character transformation and positive change of attitude toward her condition that might occur in spite of herself as a results of the unwanted pregnancy: “[I]t is just this ending of resistance that the woman who does not yet want to be pregnant may oppose” (Kamm 1992, 102). The fusion between the child’s body and her physical state not only challenges a pregnant woman’s numerical identity but also her personality: A pregnant woman will not remain the same person she was before becoming pregnant. And, although hormonal changes may move a pregnant woman to welcome the child, she may not be willing to adopt this positive attitude reconciling her to the pregnancy. Instead, she may adhere to her original stance of opposing pregnancy. Maintaining her former self as an autonomous act designed to preserve those preferences and character traits may be decisive enough for her to require terminating the pregnancy:

A woman who resists pregnancy does not now want to become a person who will value things (i.e., the fetus) other than what she values now, and she believes that she has a right to act on her current values, not the ones she might have if she became pregnant.

(Kamm 1992, 103)

The involvement position thus recognizes the acute physical and psychological transformations brought about by pregnancy and encourages the woman—thanks to her fundamental integration with these natural processes—to decide autonomously whether to terminate the pregnancy or not. Kamm’s position leaves room for considering both the corporal aspects of the violinist analogy and the normative implications which arise from the situation of physical closeness between mother and fetus. In other words, even the involvement position accommodates normative attitudes that are responses to natural developments. We have already seen that Thomson disregards the normative implications of responsibility which go hand in hand with the descriptive causation of certain states. A similar problem can be detected in the involvement position. In fact, Thomson uses the violinist analogy to illustrate the physical implications of pregnancy. But, to differentiate these implications analytically, Thomson directly cites evaluative aspects—the attitudes of the parents—as a normative framework for justifying abortion. It would be better to follow Kamm, who fills this gap by analyzing in detail the physical and psychological effects of pregnancy: only then is it justified to point to evaluative attitudes as a reaction to these effects.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, although Thomson does not adequately take into account the full consequences of the physical and psychological relationship between mother and fetus, with the violinist analogy she makes an important start toward emphasizing the significance of these relationships.



## The Notion of Privacy

The plausibility of conceiving pregnancy as a condition affecting a woman's whole life and personal identity also relies on the fact that pregnancy, due to its physical dimensions, can hardly be compared to any other physical condition—it is neither a disease, nor a social dependency, nor a defense against external threats. Pregnancy is an asymmetrical condition, at once interior separation and integration, and, as such, open to resorting to the physical integration between woman and fetus as *one* way of managing this ambiguous combination. As Claudia Wiesemann argues,<sup>14</sup> the sense of bodily integrity may lead to an attitude on the mother's part of adopting the needs and concerns of the fetus. *Another* way—one suggested by F.M. Kamm—would be to *deny* this integral relationship by focusing on the asymmetric corporal relationship between mother and fetus, which relates to the profound interiority, the ultimate privacy of a pregnant woman. As evident from the quotations above, pregnancy not only changes the external conditions of a woman's life, but redefines her personal way of life and her former self. Since these intimate changes challenge her privacy in a highly sensate way, the pregnant woman is free to choose whether to terminate a pregnancy or not. The decision of whether to continue or terminate her pregnancy is hers alone.<sup>15</sup>

Feminist critics have rejected justifications of abortion that invoke a woman's right to privacy. Legitimizing abortion by pointing to a right to privacy, as was the case in the *Roe vs. Wade* decision, bears the risk of relegating women's concerns to private life and therefore enforcing the exclusion of women from the public sphere (MacKinnon 1991, 1281–1328). Moreover, the underlying assumption is that every pregnant woman already has the right to control her privacy. Pregnancy, indeed, is a deeply private experience, and thus this privacy, paradoxically, also yields up reasons to justify abortion. It is not self-defense, but sovereignty and a right to privacy which, according to Ronald Dworkin, let a woman determine how her body is to be used:

The right to privacy that the Court endorsed in *Roe v. Wade* is plainly privacy in the sense of sovereignty over particular, specified decisions, and it does not follow [. . .] that it is indifferent to how her partner treats her—or how she treats him—inside her home. On the contrary: a right not to be raped or sexually violated is another example of a right to control how one's body is used. Nor does it follow that the government has no responsibility to assure the economic conditions that make the exercise of the right possible and its possession valuable. On the contrary: recognizing that women have a constitutional right to determine how their own bodies are to be used is a prerequisite, not a barrier, to the further claim that the government must ensure that this right is not illusory.

(Dworkin 1993, 53–54)



The involvement position encourages this perspective and applies it to the issue of abortion. It supports the pregnant woman's autonomy by acknowledging the private character of pregnancy, which is primarily experienced by the pregnant woman herself and not by the fetus or other persons.<sup>16</sup> This focus on pregnancy's character may provide sufficient reasons to justify abortion, even if other circumstances may be decisive.<sup>17</sup>

Thomson's violinist analogy highlights the child's deep, asymmetric dependence on the mother in her womb, yet it simultaneously treats mother and child as moral peers. The argumentative problems created by this ambiguity have frequently been noted. That their impact is not confined solely to questions of the mother's responsibility makes the violinist analogy a problematic means for justifying a woman defending herself against unwanted pregnancy. It is much more convincing to ground a pregnant woman's self-defense, as the involvement position does, in an interpretation of the violinist analogy which highlights the asymmetric quality of a pregnancy. This, however, implies conceiving of the fetus *not* as a person with full moral rights, but as a dependent being, whose claims are "weaker than those of the pregnant woman" (Davis 1984, 206). The violinist analogy, as developed by Thomson, allows for both—regarding woman and violinist as moral peers, and pointing to the deep, asymmetric bodily relationship between mother and unborn child. From the outset, it mixes biological and normative assumptions and therefore fails to consider the normative implications arising from an analysis of the biological conditions of pregnancy. Nevertheless, while the violinist analogy also allows taking the asymmetric biological conditions of pregnancy as such into account, the involvement position, which also takes this overall approach, is more persuasive in justifying abortion from this perspective.

## Notes

- 1 Besides respect for a patient's autonomy, Beauchamp and Childress regard the principles of nonmaleficence, beneficence and justice as decisive fundamental values in medical ethics.
- 2 It is sometimes emphasized that unhooking the machines cannot be equated with killing the violin player, but has to be regarded as a form of letting him die. The difference between killing someone and letting someone die is frequently discussed in applied ethics and plays a substantial role in questions dealing with the legitimacy of abortion. As I am mainly interested in problems of responsibility, in this chapter, I will not discuss this conceptual feature of evaluating actions.
- 3 This perspective results, for example, from Iris Marion Young's view on pregnancy as a bodily state which overcomes the dualist distinction between subject and object. Following Julia Kristeva and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Young points out that pregnancy challenges assumptions which regard the self as being constituted by first-person thoughts and perceptions. Whereas these accounts ignore the importance of the external world for constituting first-person thoughts and attitudes, pregnancy can transcend this perspective. By physically integrating an "object" of the external world into the body of the experiencing subject, it connects the subjective, first-person perspective with the objective world. In



pregnancy, a transformation takes place of the formerly split subject into bodily unity with the unborn child: “[T]he foetus’ movements are wholly mine, completely within me, conditioning my experience and space” (Young 1984, 47). Although they belong to another individual, the movements of the fetus are perceived as if performed by the pregnant woman herself (Young 1984, 48).

- 4 Ibid., 49.
- 5 This experiment is initiated by a further analogy, in which Thomson assumes that it is not seeds that get into the room, but a burglar who climbs through the window despite the woman concerned having “had bars installed outside [her] windows, precisely to prevent burglars from getting in, and a burglar got in only because of a defect in the bars” (Thomson 1971, 58). I will not discuss this experiment as it cannot be fully compared to an unwanted pregnancy that is not the result of sexual abuse. The burglar as burglar *intends* to harm the woman. Such an intention, however, cannot be attributed to the embryo or the fetus. As the fetus is not a typical “aggressor,” it is questionable whether the pregnant woman has a right to defend herself against it. Due to these problematic implications, I will not discuss the burglar analogy, but I will address the notion of self-defense below.
- 6 See for an overview concerning the responsibility objection against Thomson’s position McMahan 2002, 364.
- 7 Indeed, Thomson refers to the distinction between a so-called Good Samaritan and a Minimally Decent Samaritan, and it is the actions of the latter which can be demanded in morality. A Good Samaritan does everything he can to help others, although this help is highly disadvantageous to himself. Even if these actions are commendable and praiseworthy, they are not suitable for establishing universal moral norms. The upshot of this is clear: No one can be obligated to act like Good Samaritans, it is sufficient to act like a Minimally Decent Samaritan. Thomson applies this distinction to the case of Kitty Genovese. Genovese was murdered in 1964 while 38 persons watched and listened to the attack without coming to help. In this situation, Thomson holds, we are not required to act as Good Samaritans: Genovese would not have been murdered if one of the bystanders had called the police and thus acted like a Minimally Decent Samaritan (Thomson 1971, 62–64).
- 8 The volitional aspects of Thomson’s approach are also highlighted by McMahan (McMahan 2002, 373).
- 9 The volitional attitude of the mother or both parents also allows for rejecting duties which may arise from the fetus’s right to life. The question whether moral rights entail special duties to others for their fulfillment (and if so, which kind of duties) is the subject of an important issue in ethics and philosophy of law and is comprehensively discussed by Thomson herself. Her argumentation rests on the assumption that there is no strict duty which corresponds to a person’s right to life: Even if every human person has a right to life, it is often not clear at all who is responsible to provide the means to secure it (Thomson 1971, 57–61).
- 10 Elizabeth Ashford, for example, claims that the responsibilities for compensating violations (not only) of social human rights do not only concern the actors who caused the violation, but also those who benefit from it or who are capable of preventing it, even if they did not cause it (Ashford 2007).
- 11 This can also be shown with an example from applied ethics. In discussions about reducing severe poverty, for example, there are many ways of attributing responsibility for unintended and unwanted, but still calculable consequences. In this context, some authors argue for compensation for our contribution to institutions which hinder poor countries from selling their products on the global market. Indeed, we may not have directly endangered the livelihood of many people living in severe poverty—we did not steal their harvest or prevented them



from getting better possibilities to cultivate their fields. Nevertheless, we voted for or tolerate institutions ensuring Europe's affluence at the cost of these countries. Hence, we have certain duties to compensate for our support of unjust institutions, and these duties arise from our responsibilities to those who suffer from severe poverty, even though our individual causal contribution is significantly less than that of many politicians and economists. For an overview in this debate, see Pogge 2007, 12–53.

- 12 Jeff McMahan emphasizes the father's responsibility in this context: "[M]ost of us believe that the father of a child may have certain duties to it even if he has done everything possible to avoid or renounce responsibility for the child" (McMahan 2002, 374).
- 13 It bears mentioning here that the normative consequences which result from the responsibility position and the involvement position are different: The responsibility objection holds that a pregnant woman is responsible for the child's life *because* she has actively caused it. The involvement position, in contrast, claims that a woman is justified in aborting the child *even though* she has caused it: Due to the immense physical and psychological implications of pregnancy, the pregnant woman is passively committed to nature and at the mercy of natural reproductive processes. If she is not willing to accept these impositions, the only way to regain her autonomy may be by terminating the pregnancy.
- 14 "The mother feels responsible for the maturing being. She does not regard it as if she were a distanced observer who observes certain development steps and draws conclusions from them. Instead, she is in a relationship with that being characterized by care and responsibility" (Wiesemann 2006, 31. My translation).
- 15 There may be intermediate positions between these two, but I will gloss over this point.
- 16 This does not mean that other persons, especially the father of the unborn child, do not have to be considered, and there are indeed many discussions of the role and responsibility of the father (McMahan 1993, 341). As I am mainly interested in discussing the physical implications of pregnancy, which cannot be experienced by the father, I will not go into this subject here.
- 17 Even Thomson assumes that there are conditions under which aborting a child would be indecent; for example, if, by reason of the pregnancy, a holiday has to be cancelled. As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter and in the previous note, I am merely interested in the ontological implications of pregnancy and not in additional facets like this.

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# 13 “Living in Contradiction”

## Iris Marion Young’s Contribution to the Philosophy of Sports

*Martine Prange*

### 1. Introduction

The American philosopher and former professor of Political Science at the University of Chicago Iris Marion Young (1949–2006) is primarily known for her feminist and political philosophies, driven by approaches adopted from phenomenology and critical theory. Combining insights from philosophers as diverse as Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–1961), Simone de Beauvoir (1908–1986), Jürgen Habermas (\*1929), and Julia Kristeva (\*1941), she takes issue with theories and practices of justice, power, and democracy. In the current essay, however, I introduce Young as a key figure in the brief history of the philosophy of sports. The philosophy of sports is concerned with questions about aesthetics, the value of play, the ethics of competition, and sports’ relation to gender inequality. Young’s essay “Throwing like a girl” (1980) is a canonical text in this history, I argue, because of its groundbreaking reflection on the gendered nature of athletic movement.<sup>1</sup>

I develop my argument by way of a critical analysis of “Throwing Like a Girl.” In § 2 and 3, I argue that Young’s essay is an excellent starting-point for reflection on the variety of bodily and social resistances female athletes experience in sports. Combining Beauvoir’s concept of “situatedness” with Merleau-Ponty’s concept of the “lived body,” it offers a sophisticated account of what Young terms “the three modalities” of female movement to argue that female athletes live a “life in contradiction” between transcendence (freedom) and immanence (lack of freedom). Women in sports, Young shows, move differently from men, and this is the result of women’s lived experiences of (heterosexual, male and white) norms.

Young’s argument triggers the questions of whether transcendence can ever be achieved and, if so, how. While Young has identified an important tension between transcendence and immanence, I argue in § 4 that her account suffers from two flaws. Claiming that “the female person necessarily is a subjectivity and transcendence, and she knows herself to be” based on the fact that “she is a human existence” hardly provides an argument for women’s transcendence, let alone a strong foundation for transcendence as a “lived experience.” On Young’s account, it remains unclear whether



women can ever end their lives in contradiction. Her account of “transcendence” and “immanence” therefore leads to a stalemate. Further, by implicitly identifying “transcendence” with “male” movement, Young’s account reproduces the sexist essentialism she seeks to overcome, as it suggests that women must move like men in order to experience transcendence.

Whilst Young, in her reflection “‘Throwing Like a Girl’: Twenty Years Later,” suggests that “universal values” largely coincide with “the masculine role in this male-dominated society” and should be “de-gendered” and extended to everyone, it is unclear how that process should take place. To solve this problem, I suggest that supplementing “Throwing like a Girl” with Young’s conceptual analysis developed in “Five Faces of Oppression” may help us understand which hindrances are on the road to freedom for female athletes. I claim that turning sports into a site of contestation and active resistance against hegemonic power is the key to the process of “de-gendering” athletic spaces and movements and to opening up the possibility of transcendence.

This leads me to the conclusion in § 5 that Young’s essay is important for the field of sports and gender studies in so far as it shows that the female athletes’ experience of transcendence, and therefore their humanity and autonomy, is compromised. They therefore indeed live a life in contradiction, as Young’s “Throwing Like a Girl” shows. Transcendence, freedom and autonomy can only be extended to female athletes if sports are “de-gendered,” i.e., stripped of their “faces of oppression.” For female athletes, sports are a site of contestation, where athletic play and *agon* coincide with political *resistance*.

## 2. The Situatedness of the Lived Body

In “Throwing like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment, Motility, and Spatiality,” Young offers a phenomenological analysis of women’s bodily relations with their environments as mediated by sports. It is her goal to “theorize the effects of feminine socialization and sexual objectification on a woman’s world-making movements, describing us as unable to be free in movement” (Young 1998, 286).

Young’s account departs from Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s theory of the “lived body” developed in *The Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) and Simone de Beauvoir’s analysis of women as “the Other” laid out in *The Second Sex* (1949). Merleau-Ponty stated that “lived bodies” are the main source of human experiences of, and relations with, the world. Beauvoir argued that woman “is the inessential in front of the essential. He is the Subject; he is the Absolute. She is the Other” (Beauvoir 2009, 26). Young combines Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty to address “the manner in which each sex projects her or his Being-in-the-world through movement” (Young 1998, 28).<sup>2</sup> She posits that Merleau-Ponty’s “lived body” is gendered and



situated and that its style of movement and relation to space are governed by “lived norms” (Bartky 2009, 41–2).<sup>3</sup> Young’s methodological focus on women’s *lived* experiences is in line with what Benhabib and Cornell coined “the task of feminist theoretical ‘reconstruction’” of the Western intellectual tradition, which, marked by “gender blindness,” all too often neglected concrete, lived experiences.<sup>4</sup>

Young begins her essay with a response to the claim made by the phenomenological psychologist Erwin Straus (1891–1975) that there is a “remarkable difference in the manner of throwing of the two sexes” and that this difference in throwing style must be “the manifestation of a biological, not an acquired, difference” (Young 2005, 27–28).<sup>5</sup> Straus suggests that girls biologically have a “feminine attitude” toward space and the world, and girls have a different style of throwing balls than boys because they are “feminine.” Young uses this viewpoint to argue that, if there are gendered or sex differences in bodily movement and behavior that are taken to be “definitive for the structure and meaning of human lived experience” (Young 2005, 28), then these should be addressed by existential phenomenologists: “If there are indeed typical ‘feminine’ styles of body comportment and movement, this should generate for the existential phenomenologist a concern to specify such a differentiation of the modalities of the lived body” (*ibid.*). In addressing this concern, however, they should avoid relying on the idea of a “feminine essence.” In line with Beauvoir, Young insists on the “situatedness” of experiences:

Every human existence is defined by its *situation*; the particular existence of the female person is no less defined by the historical, cultural, social, and economic limits of her situation. We reduce women’s condition simply to unintelligibility if we “explain” it by appeal to some natural and ahistorical feminine essence.

(Young 2005, 29)

Despite this particularity, Young claims that there is also a commonality or “unity.” Women share experiences bound as they are to “a given socio-historical set of circumstances” (Young 2005, 29).<sup>6</sup> Hence, Young aims to divulge the “structures of feminine existence” (Young 2005, 30):

In accordance with Beauvoir’s understanding, I take “femininity” to designate not a mysterious quality or essence that all women have by virtue of being biologically female. It is, rather, a set of structures and conditions that delimit the typical *situation* of being a woman in a particular society, as well as the typical way in which this situation is lived by the women themselves.

(Young 2005, 31)<sup>7</sup>

Young wants to analyze “how women experience the body as a burden” by reference to “the situatedness of the woman’s actual bodily movement



and orientation to its surroundings and its world” (Young 2005, 29). She therefore proposes a phenomenological approach to the female body that focuses on the body “in living action,” i.e., establishing a relationship with its environment through movement. She develops this phenomenological approach by taking recourse to Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s body phenomenology. His approach is especially appealing to Young because it leaves room for “transcendence,” i.e., agency and subjectivity, or autonomy and freedom.

Thus, like Merleau-Ponty, Young believes that “it is the ordinary purposive orientation of the body as a whole toward things and its environment that initially defines the relation of a subject to its world” (Young 2005, 30). As an existentialist, Young does not want to make any universalist claims, but believes in the situatedness of the body. As a feminist, she believes that women have different bodily experiences from men. Her concern therefore is “to describe the modalities of feminine bodily existence for women situated in contemporary advanced industrial, urban, and commercial society” (ibid.). This leads her to develop a theory of the feminine style of movement that is marked by three contradictory modalities.

### 3. The Three Contradictory Modalities of Movement

Do women throw differently than men? If so, why? Young agrees with Straus that women do move differently from men, but she ascribes the difference in “body style” to women’s tendency to underestimate their “bodily capacity” (Young 2005, 34–35) rather than to a “mysterious” female essence or limited physical strength.<sup>8</sup>

Young develops her theory by analyzing her own lived experiences of athletic movement:

In this early effort to use the tools and texts of existential phenomenology for feminist philosophy, I reflected upon my own experience as a girl and woman in mid-twentieth-century white working-class urban America. Though I was an athletic child, organized sports were not available to me, and I was inhibited in my movements by the obligation to wear skirts most of the time.

(Young 1998, 286)

The assumption underlying her analysis is that “there is a particular style of bodily comportment that is typical of feminine existence,” and this style relies on or consists of “particular *modalities* of the structures and conditions of the body’s existence in the world.”

Women, Young argues, take a different approach to the performance of physical tasks, which hampers them in the confident and full use of their bodily capacities to complete a certain task. Generally speaking, men (even the relatively untrained ones, according to Young) behave “with more free



motion and open reach,” putting the body “in fluid and directed motion” (Young 2005, 33), giving “self-conscious direction and placement to their motion” (Young 2005, 34).<sup>9</sup> By contrast, “for many women as they move in sport, a space surrounds us in imagination that we are not free to move beyond; the space available to our movement is a constricted space” (Young 2005, 33); consequently, “women often approach a physical engagement with things with timidity, uncertainty, and hesitancy. Typically, we lack an entire trust in our bodies to carry us to our aims” (Young 2005, 34).<sup>10</sup>

Women often “lack confidence” that they have the capacity to do what must be done, and show a “fear of getting hurt,” because, Young explains, they tend to experience their bodies “as a fragile encumbrance, rather than as the medium for the enactment of our aims” (Young 2005, 34). In addition, women often are “self-conscious about appearing awkward and at the same time do not wish to appear too strong” (Young 2005, 34). In movement, therefore, women end up in a psychological-physical “spiral,” in which they can’t do what needs to be done because they don’t believe they can, and hence they experience that they can’t. And even if they succeed, they underestimate their achievement.

This “spiral,” Young states, springs from “a lack of practice in using the body and performing tasks” (Young 2005, 35). Due to this lack of physical and sport practice, women approach their bodies and their relation to the environment differently from men, namely as a “thing” *and* a capacity.<sup>11</sup> Experiencing her body as a thing amongst other things, rather than as a tool which helps with the orientation and conquering of the world, she is hampered in experiencing and enacting upon the world’s many possibilities.

This results in three contradictory modalities of feminine movement: “*Ambiguous transcendence*,” “*inhibited intentionality*,” and “*discontinuous unity*” (Young 2005, 35). Young explains: “While feminine bodily existence is a transcendence and openness to the world, it is an *ambiguous transcendence*, a transcendence that is at the same time laden with immanence” (ibid.).<sup>12</sup> “Transcendence” in Merleau-Ponty’s body phenomenology, refers to the moment that the body enters in an open, direct relation with the “world in action”: “The lived body as transcendence is pure fluid action, the continuous calling-forth of capacities that are applied to the world” (ibid.). The body grasps things, it touches things; it approaches and appropriates the world. By contrast, “immanence” is the state of the body enclosed in itself, without applying its capacities to the world. So, on this account, the body develops from a state of immanence to a state of transcendence. But, in reality, it doesn’t work this way for women: “Rather than simply beginning in immanence, feminine bodily existence remains in immanence, or, better, is *overlaid* with immanence, even as it moves out toward the world in motions of grasping, manipulating, and so on” (ibid.).

This is visible in the fact that women often do not use their whole bodies, but only a part of their bodies, in athletic movements like throwing, hitting, or kicking: “Only part of the body, that is, moves out toward a task, while



the rest remains rooted in immanence” (ibid.). The majority of the female body remains relatively immobile, as it is experienced as a burden or as something that needs to be protected, rather than as a capacity or a valuable tool one can use to achieve a physical task. The possibilities opened up by “the bodily ‘I can’” are limited, for women: “Feminine existence [. . .] often does not enter bodily relation to possibilities by its own comportment toward its surroundings in an unambiguous and confident ‘I can’” (ibid.).

As a result of this, the female experience of transcendence remains ambiguous, “*overlaid* with immanence,” and the relation of intentionality that exists between her and the world remains “inhibited” (ibid.). That is to say, the “I can” is obstructed by “a self-imposed ‘I cannot’” (ibid.). Uninhibited intentionality constitutes a “harmony” between the subject’s aim, the body, and the surroundings in which the body performs this task. This harmony is often absent from feminine movements because they “stiffen against the performance of the task” (Young 2005, 37). This “hesitancy” leads to the experience that the world is not “a system of possibilities that are correlative to its intentions,” but “appears to be a system of frustrations correlative to its hesitancies” (ibid.). There may be many possibilities, but not for me, the woman thinks.

Consequently, she also experiences the third modality of feminine bodily existence, namely “discontinuous unity” (Young 2005, 38). This originates in the fact that women have a “lack in body unity” because they tend not to use their whole bodies in performing a task which requires the use of the whole body to be achieved: “The character of the inhibited intentionality whereby feminine motion severs the connection between aim and enactment, between possibility in the world and capacity in the body, itself produces this discontinuous unity” (ibid.). Because women are always “both subject and object for itself at the same time” (ibid.) on account of Young’s three modalities theory, the idea of subjectivity (transcendence) is at stake:

Feminine bodily existence is self-referred in that the woman takes herself to be the object of the motion rather than its originator; [. . .] to the extent that a woman is uncertain of her body’s capacities and does not feel that its motions are entirely under her control [. . .] [and] to the extent that the feminine subject posits her motion as the motion that is looked at.

(Young 2005, 38–39)

This has the following implications for the feminine experience of space: “Feminine existence lives space as *enclosed* or confining, as having a *dual* structure, and the woman experiences herself as *positioned* in space” (Young 2005, 39). Just as women take a double stance toward their own bodies and bodily movements, they take a double stance toward the space in which they move. Young calls this a “double spatiality,” or the “dual structure” of space. The aim to be achieved in the “yonder” by the body as capacity



is not (only) what a woman moves towards, but also that which she sees as something that is out of her reach. As far as the woman experiences herself as object, she exists “*in space*” (Young 2005, 41). This means that space is not constituted by the body, as Merleau-Ponty claims, rather, the space a woman experiences (or “lives”) constitutes *her*: “Feminine spatiality is contradictory insofar as feminine bodily existence is both spatially constituted and a constituting spatial subject” (ibid.). The first part of this sentence reveals that the female body is not the subject of motion, but contrarily held “*in place*” by her surroundings; the latter divulges that Young still holds to Merleau-Ponty’s notion of transcendence or subjectivity.

The question we are left to face is whether transcendence and subjectivity can be experienced at all by women, or if their existence is too heavily “overlaid with immanence.”

#### 4. Ending the Life in Contradiction by Way of “De-Gendering”

With her sophisticated account of the body in living action, Young opens up space for the *philosophical* and *phenomenological* reflection on women’s sports. Women’s sport studies now research the history of women’s sports, the meaning of sports for women and their position in society, and the influence of gendered norms on the organization and experience of sports.<sup>13</sup> Especially in male-dominated sports such as football (soccer), women experience sports both as a field of liberation and emancipation and as oppressing and discriminatory, because of the continued comparison with the men’s game and the male hegemony more generally, which turns women into “the Other.”<sup>14</sup> As “the Other,” i.e., the “inessential correlate to man,” the female person is viewed “as mere object and immanence” and thus denied autonomy:

The culture and society in which the female person dwells [,] defines woman as Other, as the inessential correlate to man, as mere object and immanence. Woman is thereby both culturally and socially denied the subjectivity, autonomy, and creativity that are definitive of being human and that in patriarchal society are accorded the man.

(Young 2005, 31)

Striving to promote women’s autonomy, however, Young also claims that “the female person necessarily is a subjectivity and transcendence, and she knows herself to be” based on the fact that “she is a human existence” (Young 2005, 31). Women in patriarchal societies therefore “live a contradiction”: “As human she is a free subject who participates in transcendence, but her situation as a woman denies her that subjectivity and transcendence” (Young 2005, 32). Young suggests that “the modalities of feminine bodily comportment, motility, and spatiality exhibit this same tension



between transcendence and immanence, between subjectivity and being a mere object" (Young 2005, 32).<sup>15</sup> However, she doesn't want to give up on the idea of subjectivity as a transcendence, because human freedom lies in this transcendence: "To be sure, any lived body exists as a material thing as well as a transcending subject" (Young 2005, 39).<sup>16</sup>

While Young has identified an important tension, her account suffers from two flaws. First, it is unclear what the relationship is between "transcendence" and "immanence" and how immanence (i.e., the lack of freedom) can be transformed into transcendence (i.e., freedom). Claiming that "the female person necessarily is a subjectivity and transcendence, and she knows herself to be" based on the fact that "she is a human existence" hardly provides an argument for women's transcendence, let alone a strong foundation for transcendence as a "lived experience." Second, by privileging transcendence, Young implicitly takes male athletic movement as the norm.

So, what exactly is the relationship between transcendence and immanence, on Young's account, and does sport open up the possibility of transforming the experience of immanence into transcendence? Is transcendence for female athletes the same as for male athletes, or does it represent an unattainable ideal of fully free movement rather than an achievable goal? Young fails to give a satisfying and clear account of this. It seems that Young takes male athletic movement as ideal, because the male athlete is capable of actually experiencing freedom and transcendence while the female athlete only knows theoretically that she has the capability to experience this "as human existence." However, the female athlete does not seem to *live* the opportunity. Young's account of the female athlete "living in contradiction" *de facto* leads to a stalemate between transcendence and immanence: she concludes that this is the situation female athletes find themselves in, but she does not theorize the exact nature of transcendence, nor the nature of the relation between transcendence and immanence. How, for instance, can female athletes transform immanence into a lived experience of transcendence, autonomy, and freedom? Is the idea that on Young's account, female athletes could "only" experience freedom by moving "like a boy"?

In reflecting on her essay 20 years later, Young refers to the problem caused by her belief in universality and situatedness, and, related to this, in transcendence and immanence: "Throwing like a girl" contains an implicit tension between its humanism and its effort to specify the modalities of that human universal" (Young 1998, 288). Nevertheless, she reiterates that "[w]omen are [. . .] even under the oppressions of patriarchy, active subjects, full of wit and wile, with active projects of their own" (Young 1998, 287). It is just that "in male-dominated society men are enabled to realize those standards and values to a greater extent than women" (Young 1998, 288). Young's feminist project thus amounts to this: "The values of universal humanity, that is, are largely coincidental with the masculine role in this male-dominated society, and the goal is to de-gender them and extend them to everyone" (Young 1998, 288).



*How* should this “de-gendering” be done?<sup>17</sup> Young seems to imply that, in order to emancipate, women need to adopt the “male” modalities of movement, because it is the male free and full use and occupation of space in athletic movement that opens up the sphere of transcendence, autonomy, and universal humanity. However, I suggest we draw on Young’s later work on oppression in *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990) to provide a better solution to this problem.<sup>18</sup>

Due to the domination of the male gaze and masculine power hegemony, women’s sports are permeated by at least two of Young’s “five faces of oppression,” namely marginalization and cultural imperialism.<sup>19</sup> Sports marginalize women by judging female athletic movements and achievements according to heteronormative, male norms of feminine appearance and behavior, as well as of athletic movement and success. Marginalization is a process of exclusion, which relegates women to a lower standing and to the edges of society. Cultural imperialism is a process of *intrusion*, in which the dominant group (men) project their own experiences and norms as representative of the whole domain (sports), thereby neglecting, annulling, overhauling, and stereotyping other groups’ (women’s) experiences and standards. Cultural imperialism reinforces the experiences and consequences of marginalization. The marginalized are not of real qualitative, technical, and commercial value to the (sports) community. Instead, they are considered a burden or threat to the homogeneity and capital of that community.

This suggests that women’s “situatedness” coincides with two forms of oppression, namely “marginalization” and “cultural imperialism.” The lived experience of the male norm is the result of the cultural imperialism that pervades sports. And the marginalization of women is the result of the fact that this cultural imperialism consists in spreading and reinforcing male dominance and norms.<sup>20</sup> Hence relating these two analyses helps our understanding of the “tensed relation” between transcendence and immanence: Women in fact live a life of immanence, and transcendence is only possible after deliverance of the political fight for female rights in sports, i.e., the fight for gender equality. For this reason, sport is a field of athletic and political contestation.<sup>21</sup> The athletic *agon* is also a political struggle and the fight for aesthetic freedom is a fight for political freedom. Sports thus is a domain where women embody various forms of athletic and social resistances and where oppression is turned into a form of conflict that may actually produce freedom, autonomy, and emancipation.

In sum, while Young’s essay offers a good starting-point for theorizing forms of athletic and embodied political resistances and inequalities, only the combination with her account of oppression gives an idea of how sports can help female athletes attain genuine transcendence, freedom, and autonomy.<sup>22</sup>



## 5. Conclusion: Young’s Contribution to the Philosophy of Sports

Merleau-Ponty turned the phenomenological attention from the mind to the body in action. Young pushed this project forward by reflecting on gendered body experiences, doing so in the context of sports, and taking her own personal experiences as the starting-point of philosophical analysis.<sup>23</sup> As such, she opened up space for further body-phenomenological reflection on the experience of being a woman, refining Merleau-Ponty’s account with her theory of modalities of movement and her analysis of “situatedness.” By pointing to the often impeded interaction between body and space and the social, historical, and gendered dimensions of space, she also opened up the possibility of reflecting on the relation between physiologically and socially structured bodily, and spatial and gendered, experiences.

Further, by supplementing Beauvoir’s theory of the woman as the Other with her modified theory of the body in living action, Young opened up space for the *philosophical* and *phenomenological* reflection on women’s sports. Women’s sport studies now research the history of women’s sports, the meaning of sports for women and their position in society, and the influence of gendered norms on the organization and experience of sports. “Throwing Like a Girl” shows that movement, in and out of sports, play a crucial role in the lived experience of being a free, autonomous subject and being a woman hampered in her autonomy and humanity. It thus affirms that the relationship between womanhood and sports deserves specific attention, because athletic movements carried out by women indeed are generally valued according to the male norm, even though the masculine and feminine history of moving and sports are very different.

Sports, in the Youngian sense, do not constitute a space of individual excellence and fraternity, but of gender fault lines defined by the “male gaze” of patriarchal culture. The sporting female, she shows, is not a woman exercising, but a social construct, the product of (heteronormative) prejudice. Young’s account implies that social, normative contexts need to be uncovered if we are to conduct sports studies. It further entails that we need to take sports into account if we are to consider gendered spaces in feminist theory. In sport studies, like sports media, women’s sports are marginalized. Women’s sport studies, therefore, have a societal and philosophical relevance, which goes beyond the domain of sports. The real contribution of Young’s essay to the philosophy of sports lies in the awareness it shows that if we reflect on sports, we need to account for the relationship between body and space, and its gendered, historical, and social dimensions to point out the life in contradiction between transcendence and immanence.

Though not her direct intention, Young’s critique indirectly affirms Schiller’s viewpoint that without the opportunity to play freely and in harmony with ourselves, humankind cannot fulfill its humanity.<sup>24</sup> It is exactly this



freedom to play and exercise, and thus realize their autonomy and humanity, which is at stake for women. While men have the privilege to play and move freely, this freedom is still often to be contested for female athletes. They therefore indeed live a life in contradiction, as Young's "Throwing Like a Girl" shows. Transcendence, freedom and autonomy can only be extended to female athletes if sports are "de-gendered," i.e., stripped of its "faces of oppression." For female athletes, sports are a site of contestation, where athletic play and *agon* coincide with political *resistance*.<sup>25</sup>

## Notes

- 1 "Throwing like a Girl" was first published in *Human Studies* 3 (1980): 137–156. For my analysis, I use Young 2005.
- 2 She follows the Dutch physiologist F.J.J. Buytendijk, but does not note, however, that Buytendijk was a typical proponent of patriarchal culture, claiming that women were suited for sports such as field hockey, but not for "manly" sports, such as football. Buytendijk even claimed that no one had succeeded in getting women to play soccer, thereby ignoring the fact that women had started playing football already in the 1890s, but that women's football was officially forbidden at the time of his writing life (in the Netherlands, women were forbidden to play football by the Dutch Royal Football Association from 1921 until 1971). Cf. Pfister 2010, and Prange and Oosterbaan 2017.
- 3 Cf. Landes 2017, 7. The "lived" body refers to the body (in German "*Leib*") as it is experienced by the one who is or has this body, involved in a human environment or interaction as opposed to the "objective" characterization of the physical body in scientific disciplines such as anatomy, biology (in German "*Körper*") etc. Cf. Welton 1998, 1–4.
- 4 They summarize this task as follows: "Focusing on women's concrete experiences across cultures, society and history, feminist theorists asked how the shift in perspective from men's to women's points of view might alter the fundamental categories, methodology and self-understanding of Western science and theory" (Benhabib and Cornell 1987, 1). Compare Ferguson 2009.
- 5 Erwin W. Straus, "The Upright Posture." Straus's essay was originally published in *Psychiatric Quarterly* in 1952. Similar to Young, Straus was influenced by Merleau-Ponty (see also Brooke, 2014).
- 6 While acknowledging economic and social factors in her analysis of female "situatedness," Young neglects sexual orientation, race and disabilities as factors that can equally influence the modalities of athletic movement. For the effect of skin color on bodily behavior in a world of "whiteness," I refer to Fanon 1986 and Ahmed 2007. Just as male bodies direct female bodies in certain directions in a patriarchal society, white bodies "orientates bodies in specific directions, affecting how they 'take up' space" (Ahmed 2007, 151). For a "queer phenomenology," see Ahmed 2006 and Ahmed 2007. Gail Weiss explicitly reacts to Young's essay, questioning the notion of the "I can" body itself as a suspect notion (Weiss 2017).
- 7 This understanding implies that some women may transcend or escape this situation, because to some women the modalities may not apply; what is more, to some individual men the situation may apply, too; "Women," in Young's sense, does not refer to all persons of the female sex, but rather to certain gendered experiences a group of people share.
- 8 Here, she seems to follow the Strausian (and traditional) perception of female bodily movement as a *lack* defined in contrast to the male norm as model of



correct, optimal movement. However, rather than pointing to physical, biological causes, as Straus does, Young points to psychological and cultural ones.

- 9 Even though Young remarks that "this is probably typical only of women in advanced industrial societies, where the model of the bourgeois woman has been extended to most women" (Young 1980, 33 note 10), and that "none of the observations that have been made thus far about the way women typically move and comport their bodies applies to all women of all time" (Young 1980, 35), she still claims that "one can nevertheless speak of a general feminine style of body comportment and movement" (Young 1980, 35).
- 10 Here, Young starts mixing "women" and "we" and reasoning on the basis of both scientific, empirical research and her own individual experiences.
- 11 This suggests that a solution for women could be "more practice," but as long as the space in which they practice is supervised by "the male gaze," this would probably not make much sense.
- 12 As Ahmed calls it: "'Doing things' [taking action, MP] depends not so much on intrinsic capacity, or even upon dispositions or habits, but on the ways in which the world is available as a space for action, a space where things 'have a certain place' or are 'in place'" (Ahmed 2007, 153).
- 13 Cf. Jennifer Hargreaves 1994. See also: Van den Bogert 2017.
- 14 Cf. Prange and Oosterbaan 2017.
- 15 This and the idea that sports both liberate *and* oppress women lie at the basis of our analysis that women's football in the Netherlands is caught in three paradoxes (Prange and Oosterbaan 2017).
- 16 In making her case, Young adopts Merleau-Ponty's ontology of the lived body as the location of subjectivity (in contrast to Sartre and other philosophers of mind). Young's and Merleau-Ponty's focus are on the "pure presence to the world and openness upon its [the body's, MP] possibilities" (ibid.). The possibilities are opened up by the bodily capacities or capabilities, which Merleau-Ponty calls, after Husserl, "the bodily 'I can'" (Young 2005, 36). On this account, clearly, the body comes before its "genderedness" and as a result, Young sticks to the Husserlian idea of "transcendence," which is linked to the idea of a "pure" presence.
- 17 The question is whether this is a process of "de-gendering" or "re-gendering" women. As she further admits, her account is "based on a masculine, and not a gender neutral, model of action," privileging "plan, intention and control" (Young 1998, 288–289). As a result, "the model of action 'Throwing like a girl' takes as paradigmatic, that is, may harbour masculinist bias that values typically masculine activities more than the typically feminine" (Young 1998, 289). Thus, while Bartky (2009, 50) argues that the essay does not endorse "the superiority of masculine styles of movement" at all, Young herself acknowledged that she equated free movement with the optimal use of space and the optimal use of space with *male* movement and transcendence as the model towards which humans should strive.
- 18 I agree with La Caze that "Young's earlier essays in feminist phenomenology concerning the lived body can be linked to her later political thought, despite her own separation of these two strands in her work" (La Caze 2014, 431; Cf. La Caze 2008).
- 19 The other faces of oppression are violence, powerlessness, and exploitation. She argues that all oppressed people "suffer some inhibition of their ability to develop and exercise their capacities and express their needs, thoughts, and feelings. In that abstract sense, all oppressed people face a common condition. Beyond that, in any more specific sense, it is not possible to define a single set of criteria that describe the condition of oppression of the above groups" (Young



- 2011, 40). She considers oppression of groups not in the traditional sense of “tyranny exercised by a ruling group,” but as “the disadvantage and injustice some people suffer [. . .] because of the everyday practices of a well-intentioned liberal society” (Young 2011, 41).
- 20 Women’s sports studies also show that woman’s sport, and indeed its marginalization, are a prism, a mirror of broader social developments, such as the “cultural imperialism” of patriarchies and their heteronormative, male gaze (cf. Prange and Oosterbaan 2017).
- 21 Compare Brennan 2016, 907–8.
- 22 We identify different forms of resistances female a football players encounter and exercise on and off the pitch in Prange and Oosterbaan 2017, thereby (albeit implicitly) extending Young’s analysis of the five faces of oppression.
- 23 As Michaela Ferguson rightly states: “Among the most important contributions of Young’s work in feminist theory is that she gives us an account of the political importance of personal experience [. . .]. Young suggests that personal experiences become political when they *resonate* with others [. . .] stories that are meant to resonate with us [. . .] demand that we do more than read: they demand that we act to create a more just world” (Ferguson 2009, 54). Young’s hope, Ferguson claims, “goes beyond recognition: she wants us to act” (Ferguson 2009, 67).
- 24 Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805) and Johan Huizinga (1872–1945), in their renowned *Letters on Aesthetic Education* (1795) and *Homo Ludens* (1938) respectively, point out the importance of play for humanity; indeed, Schiller famously claims that without the opportunity to play freely, we cannot fulfil our humanity. And while Young does not refer to Schiller or Huizinga, it is exactly this freedom to play—and thus their autonomy and humanity—that is at stake for women.
- 25 See Prange and Oosterbaan 2017.

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# 14 Autonomy, Emotional Vulnerability, and the Dynamics of Power<sup>1</sup>

*Carla Bagnoli*

## 1. Emotional Vulnerability and Challenges to Autonomy

It is a platitude that emotions make us vulnerable. They do so in a variety of ways. Vulnerability is a generic ontological feature of our being embodied, which indicates a general capacity for being affected and subject to change. I call emotional vulnerability the capacity to be emotionally affected and to emotionally affect others. It is important to categorize emotional vulnerability as a “capacity,” so as to dissociate it from the categories of passivity and submission. Being a capacity, vulnerability can be “exercised.” It can be habituated and educated more or less intelligently and perspicuously. There are norms for the proper exercise of one’s capacity to being emotionally affected and to emotionally affect others, some of which are moral (Gibbard 1990). We can exercise our emotional capacities aptly or inaptly, appropriately or inappropriately, virtuously or viciously, in a functional or dysfunctional way. Furthermore, we are held responsible for such an exercise, hence emotional vulnerability does not amount to passively undergoing emotional changes. In some specified circumstances, vulnerability is pathogenic and indicative or constitutive of morally problematic relations to oneself or to others. The distinction between constitutive and circumstantial vulnerability will be helpful to track the various relations between emotional vulnerability and autonomy.<sup>2</sup>

Traditionally, philosophers have concentrated on markedly conflictual relations.<sup>3</sup> They have focused on whether and how emotions threaten autonomy, insofar as they lie outside the sphere of rational agency. That is, they have conceptualized emotional vulnerability as passivity. Second, they have considered how emotions are insensitive to rational judgment, focusing on cases in which emotions are dissonant or recalcitrant. Third, in recognizing the motivational force of emotions, philosophers have tracked their negative impact on rational deliberation. Indeed, emotions are often contrastive elements in rational deliberation. They appear to defeat deliberative judgments about what to do, survive rational deliberation or preempt the very possibility of rational deliberation. This is common experience and here are some simple illustrations.



- (a) At the sight of mice, Brigitte jumps on a chair, crushing a crystal vase on her rush. This sudden movement can be explained by saying that overtaken by fear Brigitte has lost control of her movements. This is a case in which the emotion of fear takes over and blocks rational deliberation.
- (b) Late on a Saturday night, people noticed Caj in pajama shouting and violently banging at his neighbor's door, in order to have him stop playing loud music. Caj is known to be a quiet and good-mannered person. His conduct on this occasion is out of character but it can be explained by the mounting force of rage, triggered by the annoying and disrespectful behavior of his neighbor. He is overcome by anger.
- (c) Valery, a mature bank teller, spreads around damaging gossips about a younger and brilliant co-worker whose career is glowing. Commenting on these episodes, colleagues notice that Valery has been bitter and depressed at the fading prospects of a promotion. Valery's misconduct is less evidently a case of loss of control since it requires quite a bit of planning and calculation, but it can be explained by saying that she is overthrown by envy.

These simple cases are different enough to show that emotions may interfere with the agent's autonomy in quite different ways. Some interferences are akin to loss of rational control. Even though it is far from clear what this expression means and how exactly it relates to agential autonomy,<sup>4</sup> the example of Brigitte (a) illustrates the case in which an agent is literally swept by an emotion so that the question of how to rationally deliberate about what to do does not arise. In (b), rage does not substitute rational deliberation. We can say that it alters the manner (which becomes impolite), rather than the form of deliberation about what to do (i.e. how to ask the neighbor to stop playing music). Caj's agency is altered on this occasion, but not his character; he is acting in a fit of anger, that is, out of character. In (c), instead, there is something more complex going on since Valery's rational capacities are driven by envy and put at the service of a misguided end. There is a loss of moral integrity that is hard to explain without calling into play a normative distortion of the rational capacities—something that is not occasional and circumstantial but structural and constitutive, that is, a corruption of the mind. This is how envy is a vice.

These examples may seem to confirm a traditional representation of emotions as constitutive liabilities, since they are ineradicable sources of interferences with practical rationality. But there are more interesting cases in which it is apparent that emotions bear a rather complicated relation to autonomy. Love and shame provide powerful examples of the ambivalences and complexities of such a relation. In analyzing such complexities, my aim is to present a case for appreciating various dimensions of vulnerability and, correspondingly, for exposing the importance of emotional vulnerability *for* agential autonomy. This view is rooted in a general account of agential autonomy marked by mutual respect and recognition of others, as a normative



response to constitutive vulnerability, understood as the capacity to affect and be affected by others as well as by external agentive and non-agentive causes.<sup>5</sup>

## 2. Love as a Vulnerability Device

To make room for complexity, it is advisable to start with a notion of constitutive vulnerability that is neutral in respect to autonomy, so as to focus on the primary functions of social emotions and then appreciate the patterns of dysfunction that lead to pathogenic relations. Social emotions are peculiar to and characteristic of social animals. Allan Gibbard argued that emotions are above all “social” in the specific sense that they are adaptive syndromes which have evolved to foster the complex system of cooperation and reciprocity that characterize and structure the life of social animals (Gibbard 1990: 138).<sup>6</sup> I adapt this view to suggest that social emotions are devices that help us cope with ontological vulnerability and that both their primary functions and their dysfunction should be related to this feature.

Love is perhaps the most obvious case of an emotion that makes us constitutively vulnerable to others.<sup>7</sup> The category of love is rather broad, sometimes extended to various forms of friendships, empathy, and compassion for others, and sometimes extended to non-human animals or non-animated objects. I will focus primarily on “romantic love” because I take to be a defining feature of this kind of love that makes lovers constitutively emotionally vulnerable to one another and constantly interfering with one another. I take romantic love as an “emotion complex” because it is not only an emotional state, but a complex cluster of interlocking affective and cognitive relations between persons, which develop or degenerate in time. I chose this characterization because it highlights the dynamic and active dimensions of love. Love is not something that merely happens to us, an emotion that suddenly strikes us at some point in time and for some time, even though it clearly is not something we decide at will. To call it love, lovers need to establish a “loving relation” to one another, which maintains an important emotional core. A loving relation may be more or less demanding but it always requires effort, deliberation, mutual understanding and commitment. Among other things, loving is a complex activity, in which lovers are actively engaged. To call it love, lovers must be committed on the basis of a shared understanding of what happens to them. To this extent, the activity of loving is communal or mutual.<sup>8</sup>

As I hope to prove in the course of the argument, this sort of emotional vulnerability and interference should not be considered a challenge to autonomy, but there is a vivid risk that loving relations undermine agential autonomy in particular.<sup>9</sup> For instance, lovers may become used to think of their partners as indispensable in activities that they could conduct by themselves. For instance, suppose (d) Sue stopped doing anything recreational without her husband Simon. This is neither the result of a decision, nor is it



an attempt to accommodate Simon's request or desire. In fact, she does not even know how this happened or why. Sue simply stopped doing things by herself because she became used to enjoying doing things with Simon. This is a very common tale among couples, which does not per se indicate any pathogenic partnership, but it indicates a tendency that originates in having rearranged one's life plan so as to include one's lover, in ways that end up in a limitation of the individual sphere of agency. Sue's limitation of agency may be thought to be self-imposed, hence still coherent with and respectful of Sue's autonomy. However, Sue reached the point of not going to movies by herself "despite herself," without any deliberation, even though not in response to Simon's demand. In some circumstances, the forceful inclusion of the beloved in one's life may exact a high toll. Such constraints and limitations of agency exemplify only some concrete ways in which love makes us vulnerable to others impinging upon the sphere of agency.

Generally, philosophers have investigated the ambivalences of love by adopting the categories of dependence and interdependence.<sup>10</sup> However, in (d), the lovers' mutual limitations and constraints on agency are not adequately explained by the concept of interdependence. They point to significant forms of vulnerability to others, but they reveal a more complex relation to autonomy. Mutually dependent persons cannot pursue their own plans, interests and goals by themselves because they need others. But this is not the case that Sue and Simon exemplify. Sue could go to movies by herself, and she is still interested in that, but she does not do it. This is not a failure of agential autonomy due to a loving relation of dependence. Thus, the notion of interdependence does not capture all the relevant kinds of constitutive vulnerability that are distinctive of love.

It may be difficult to determine exactly the line between healthy and pathogenic vulnerability, but cases such as (d) should not make us disregard the fact that love is a complex adaptive syndrome typical of social animals capable of competitive as well as cooperative interactions.<sup>11</sup> In particular, love allows us to deal with ontological vulnerability by enhancing the lovers' self and expanding their sphere of agency. Lovers are capable of enhancing themselves, by mutually defining and promoting the wellness and wellbeing of one other. The root of their mutual strength is also the root of their mutual vulnerability. We should focus on this feature of love in order to understand its distinctive relation to vulnerability and agential autonomy. As a social emotion, love belongs in a large network of emotional attitudes whose general function is to cope with the predicaments of contingency and situated agency. Many instances of activity and thinking are assisted and even constituted by forms of affectivity that are social and dynamic. It is because of love that humans are capable of exercising complex forms of agency, namely, shared agency. Thus, love makes us vulnerable to one another: not because it makes us subjected to another will or dependent on it, but because it allows us to make plans and contribute to activities that we cannot possibly pursue by ourselves. Love makes us constitutively



dependent on our beloved, exactly because it expands the sphere of our agency and enhances our capacities for agency. Rather than being a threat to our autonomy, love is one of the many ways in which we exercise agential autonomy. It requires that we engage with others, constructing with them new attentional worlds that form the background of a communal understanding.

By bringing to light the active aspects of loving relations, I do not mean to underestimate love's receptive features. Love cannot be understood but in terms of the dynamic patterns of one's emotional responsiveness to one's beloved. By insisting on the dynamic aspect of love, I mean to refer to changes, ordinary and mundane as well as deep and profound, which occur because of and through love. In the philosophical literature, they are typically experienced and expressed as changes that concern the characters of lovers. The fact that love unfolds and develops over time is importantly related to the fact that love is directed to some particular other, creates a personal relation where the lovers deeply impact on one another's emotional life and systematically and reciprocally interfere with their agency and autonomy.<sup>12</sup> To identify this feature, Amélie Rorty speaks of love as "dynamically permeable," in that each of the lovers profoundly shapes each other by loving. Lovers affect one another in ways that "tend to ramify through a person's character" (Rorty 1993: 77).

Dynamic permeability fosters changes and mutual adjustments that are merely external to the self or limited to the sort of relation they entertain and the sorts of things they do, but extend more significantly to the sort of persons they become through and by loving (Helm 2010). I suggest that dynamic permeability should be taken as an ontological and practical claim. From an ontological perspective, it says that through and by love lovers mutually change their identity and bounds of agency over time. From a practical perspective, it says that they mutually change their practical perspective on themselves, and their lives, e.g. maturing new goals, perfecting others, or abandoning old ones. This view agrees with common understanding of romantic love, which is experienced as life-changing so much that its end is often narrated as a turning point or even a loss of identity.<sup>13</sup> Such mutual permeability exposes each of the lovers to risk and unexpected change. This is to say that love makes lovers vulnerable to different sorts of luck: constitutive luck (insofar as lovers are mutually permeable by love), and circumstantial luck (insofar as they each become susceptible to circumstances in unexpected ways).

Love displays an interesting dynamic feature and it is likely that this feature might be adaptive, thus representing crucial practical resource for coping with the challenges and predicaments of contingencies. Love generates changes, and shapes the lovers' character, but most importantly it survives through changes. This is not to say that love remains invariant across its many transformation, or that it does not change when it encounters external obstacles but that it is characteristic of loving relations that they develop



in time, because of the changes they implement in their lovers. Since these changes and alterations are not likely to be under anyone's control, nor are they decided at will, this is an aspect of love that seems to threaten individual autonomy. In particular, this definition sets love apart from emotions understood as discrete mental states of which we can trace the persistence over time and reveals dimensions of profound and multifaceted vulnerability to others.

Love is typically self-enhancing, rather than self-undermining and undercutting. This is because lovers are not only bound by love, subjected to mutual responsibilities and burdens; they also affect each other in ways that create new opportunities for change and development. Loving relationships multiply the opportunities to exercise personal and agential autonomy, rather than restricting them and they are potentially self-enhancing rather than undermining our status of autonomous agents. The concept of vulnerability that I propose serves to highlight the practical capacities that we have insofar as we are susceptible to be affected by others. It is not meant to identify the sort of dependency and mutual accountability that undermine the lovers' autonomy insofar as they entertain morally problematic relations. Nor does the concept single out some categories of subjects (i.e. "the vulnerable") as the ones who are more likely to be exposed to harmful dependency and have their normative status threatened or their interests and needs frustrated for the sake of love. The sort of vulnerability that love exemplifies is neither a form of passivity nor receptivity, but the basis for important activities that qualify us as practical subjects, i.e. subjects capable of practical concerns and mutual recognition.

Against this theoretical background, I propose that we understand love as creating bonds of mutual attention and recognition, as well as foci of joint attention.<sup>14</sup> Lovers demand attention from and give attention to one another. They become resentful if they do not get enough attention and irritated if they do not get the right sort of attention. Directing attention onto the beloved one is a constitutive feature of loving relations. This characterization helps us see that the sort of emotional interdependence that constitutes love is not merely the result of a strategic interaction where two mutually well-disposed parties cooperate. Of course, love includes cooperative attitudes and promotes cooperative behaviors, but cooperation rests on all sorts of motivations and reasons. Instead, love creates a specific form of shared agency where the lovers are distinct and separate, and yet care about each other, and for the same objects. This is the result of mutual emotional and cognitive susceptibility. Through time, each of the partners call attention to objects as targets of shared concern. Such creation is historical as it is the force of such affective and emotional bonds. It has an impact on the lovers' identity, and it can be self-enhancing or self-destructing. Because love allows lovers to acquire shared objects of concerns it also makes them susceptible to gains and losses relative to these new objects of concerns. Furthermore, insofar as these objects of shared concerns create mutual expectations and



responsibilities, they also make the lovers capable to share in each other's grief and joy.

### 3. Lovers and the Dynamics of Power

A significant implication of this account is that love brings in a distinctive sort of vulnerability to luck. Lovers interfere with the beloved's agency in various ways. Some of them are common to all sorts of social interactions. Agents interfere with others by presenting obstacles to the pursuit of their goals, or by competing for resources that are required to further their ends. They also interfere with others independently of or despite their will, when they happen to be part of the causal chain that results in events obstructing the others' agency. This sort of vulnerability to others is an example of resultant luck, which is distinctive of love in that love demands attention and directs attention toward some joint foci. How this vulnerability can be self-destructive can be vividly illustrated by (e) *The Story of Adèle H.*, a French drama directed by Francois Truffaut and based on the diaries of Adèle Hugo. It tells of Adèle's obsessive and unrequited love for an English officer, lieutenant Pinson, which eventually leads her to a tragic end. Adele's tragic story is paradigmatic of a sort of vulnerability which is constitutive of love. Lovers share the responsibility of the defeat as well as of the success of their relation because they mutually represent the conditions of success of such relation. Neither is merely instrumental to it. This feature of loving relations represents a delicate tie, which can easily break in the face of adversities; but this bond most importantly represents a resource to face such adversities. This is mainly because of its motivational and normative potential, that is, its capacity to drive agents and constrain them in what they intend to do.

This claim can be objected on the ground that it is associated to a very specific and morally doubtful social structure. In some debates, romantic love is understood to be a principle introduced in modernity, which refers to intimate relationships between free and adult individuals, bound by mutual affection. Social theorists often understand this kind of intimate relation in terms of independence from economic interests, class membership and social expectations, and communal values (Honneth 2014). On this reading, lovers enjoy a distinctive type of freedom from social ties and expectations, and often are subversive and defiant of social order. Correspondingly, they are in the position of recognizing each other's distinctive value, independently of social status.<sup>15</sup> In this respect, romantic love is potentially empowering and enhancing, beyond the strictures of class and social expectations. Recent feminist studies challenge this claim, suggesting that romantic love belongs in an oppressive social, ideological and political structure, grounded on gender-based division of labor which leads to the subordination of women (Gregoratto 2017, Jónasdóttir and Ferguson 2014).<sup>16</sup> According to Gregoratto (2017), gender dichotomy systematically disrupts the interdependence



bond that is characteristic of love. Asymmetrical dependence and unequal chances of independence represent the normal state of affairs for romantic relations under conditions of gender dichotomy. This may suggest that it is methodologically more interesting to look after the dysfunction of love rather than characterize its primary adaptive function. In fact, I agree that gender-based division of labor undermines love's prospects of enhancing the self and expanding the sphere of agency. I also agree with the feminist analysis that this is a structural and systematic problem. In addition to gender dichotomy in the division of labor, there are other structural inequalities that threaten to disrupt the interdependence bond, such as social hierarchies, territorial boundaries, and political divisions. In other words, the root of the problem is larger than the feminist analysis allows us to think, and gender dichotomy should be regarded as one concrete way in which structural unfairness takes place.

#### 4. The Actors of Shame

To illustrate the varieties of emotional vulnerability, it is useful to contrast love and shame. Love makes lovers constitutively vulnerable to others, especially in the pursuit of shared ends, hence systematically interfering with their agency. Such interference can be enhancing or destructive. Lovers can mutually expand their sphere of agency or seriously undermine it. In managing such interferences, lovers can be cooperative or competitive, but they relate to each other mainly as agents. By contrast, shame exposes the agent's vulnerability to the gaze of others, hence implies others mainly as judges and observers in the practice of self-assessment.<sup>17</sup> Exactly because shame is deeply connected with being exposed to the judgment of others, it is often singled out as a particularly dangerous emotion for agential autonomy. Shame appears to be constitutively heteronomous insofar as it makes a constitutive reference to the gaze of others. How seriously shame threatens autonomy partly depends on whose gaze it refers to. To simplify, I outline two views of the matter.<sup>18</sup>

The *agent-centered view* holds that the relevant audience corresponds to the agent's own community, i.e. the community of which the agent regards herself to be an active member, and of which the agent shares the basic norms and values.<sup>19</sup> Agents feel ashamed when they fail to meet the standards that they have set for themselves (Taylor 1985; Kekes 1988). In this case, then, there is a constitutive reference to others, but the relevant others are the representatives of the agent's own moral community. The public standards of the community coincide with the agent's own standards. As a consequence, failures to meet such standards are both a failure to respond to public expectations and a failure to meet standards of one's own. On the *group-centered view*, instead, the relevant audience is constituted by a concrete community, and the normative criteria that identify the community are authoritative independently of its members' individual judgments. Typically,



members do not necessarily share all the norms and values of the community. Thus, there may be a discrepancy between the agent's own judgment and the normative standards of the community in which she belongs, that which calls for further specification and analysis. In this particular case, the agent feels ashamed for failure to meet up social expectations because these are the expectations of her community (O'Hear 1977).

The discrepancy between the agent's standards and her community is a matter of importance for autonomy. Some regard the presence of external criteria of assessment as a threat to the agent's autonomy and a possible source of objectification and alienation. The degree and significance of the discrepancy between subjective and social standards may alter the agent's membership in the community. If he does not share the norms of the community, it is reasonable to ask whether he is really a member or why he considers himself a member. Furthermore, if he is not an active member, it is not clear why it should matter to him what opinion the community holds. These questions may prove relevant in the attempt to differentiate shame from social pressure.

On the other hand, some other philosophers urge that the agent has no standing in selecting the standards by which his failures are judged. On the group-centered view, such standards are social precisely in the sense that they are not at anyone's discretion. While lack of discretionality may seem to undermine the agent's autonomy, advocates of the group-centred views hold that lack of discretionality is a positive feature insofar as it grounds, preserves, and increments the objectivity of the agent's assessment. For instance, Cheshire Calhoun holds that "to attempt to make oneself invulnerable to all shaming criticisms except those that mirror one's own autonomous judgments or that invoke ethical standards one respects is to refuse to take seriously the social practice of morality" (Calhoun 2004: 145). Rather than showing thoughtless conformism, servility, or deferential submission to others, for Cheshire Calhoun sensitivity to public standards is a sign of moral maturity (Calhoun 2004: 129). Under this capacity, shame drives changes toward alignment with external public standards and may function as a corrective.

We can go further and say that by fostering sensitivity to public standards, shame fosters and nourishes autonomy. This is because autonomy requires recognition of public parameters, even though publicity does not require that such parameters are external to the self or felt as constrictive or punitive. Furthermore, shame may be self-enhancing, and in a way rather different than love. Feeling shame may help the agent realize that she is sensitive to new normative criteria that she did not know to care about. In this case, shame is instrumental to acquiring self-knowledge and, in this specific sense, it contributes to the agent's agential autonomy. This is so insofar as self-knowledge is an important aspect of the agents' being authoritative in their agency. Gaining awareness of the normative standards of action via shame contributes to being a more authoritative and autonomous agent.



Shame contributes to agential authority by revealing the agent's relation to others, understood as representative of an authoritative community. Being ashamed in facing others reflect that those others are authoritative sources of moral judgment.<sup>20</sup> An important question is whether the pull that shame legitimately exerts on the agent depends on the special ties the agent entertains to the respected others, trusted or otherwise credited others, e.g. membership ties.

Reference to vulnerability appears in various accounts of shame. For Bernard Williams "the root of shame lies in exposure [...] in being at a disadvantage"; it results in loss of power (Williams 1993: 220). For David Velleman, "shame is the anxious sense of being compromised in one's self-presentation in a way that threatens one's social recognition as a self-presenting person" (Velleman 2006: 67). Velleman relates shame fundamentally with "failures of privacy," which induces social vulnerability and concealment. Indeed, many authors have insisted upon the association with concealment, especially as a consequence of an attack on privacy (Nagel 1998, Nussbaum 2004). Simon Blackburn remarks that "when we are ashamed we think that we are in a position where others who witness would or could despise us. Fear of shame or shame itself motivates us to hide ourselves from the gaze of others" (Blackburn 1998: 17).

My view is that shame is related to vulnerability in a more radical sense than these accounts acknowledge. Vulnerability is not merely induced by exposure to an audience but revealed and exhibited by exposure. Shame responds to threats against membership in a concrete community, hence also against attacks on its cooperative schemes. Gibbard identifies two main grounds for being disqualified from cooperative schemes: lack of appropriate resources and skills, and lack of required motivation. His conjecture is that feelings of shame stem from awareness of lack of resources or skills, while guilty feelings react to lack of motivation. Correspondingly, recognition of lack of resources or skills that make one a fellow in a cooperative scheme generates neglect and disdain; while the reaction to lack of motivation is anger. Transgression and failure to meet the standards of participation in cooperative schemes call for different emotional reactions: guilt typically responds to transgression and tends to amends, while shame responds to failures and tends toward withdrawal. Shame is related to a vulnerability that undermines one's place in the relevant community and threatens neglect, abandonment, isolation, or exclusion from shared benefits. However, its significance as a moral response toward failure to abide by the normative standards is not punitive, but corrective. Insofar as shame signals agential failures, it also and at the same time suggests and encourages development of one's powers (Gibbard 1990: 139).

## 5. Submissive Shame and Social Pressure

To hold that love and shame are adaptive syndromes whose primary function is to foster individual capacities in cooperative schemes is not to say



that they always work toward moral progress.<sup>21</sup> Emotional dependence is often importantly related to manipulation and, sometimes, coercion. It appears that shame is inevitably mixed with the exercise of social power and sometimes hardly differentiated from social pressure. In fact, the practice of shaming is potentially coercive insofar as it represents a form of social pressure. Because of its constitutive reference to the gaze of others, shame may easily become an oppressive tool. Several phenomena of shame indicate how emotional vulnerability is also vulnerability to social schemes of power. I will consider maladaptive and submissive shame.

Maladaptive shame is a psychological condition where the subject feels a sort of diffused, global shame, which invests all departments of her existence, rather than being confined to specific defective skills or performances in given paradigmatic situations. Let us take the case (f) of H  l  ne, who is a talented scholar with a marked tendency to leadership. While the research environment is highly competitive, her team favors a gregarious scheme, which values modesty and discourages independence. Because of her tendency to independence, she is prone to make a distinctive sort of mistakes in team working, due to contrastive attitudes which eventually undermine the team's cooperative scheme and compromise the research results. H  l  ne's failure is local and relative to the exercise to a particular skill, but she feels a total failure. She knows that her failure to meet the expectation of the team is rooted in her personality trait, and this is why she feels that her recurrent failure is incorrigible and she is not motivated to modify her behavior. Her shame is overwhelming and paralyzing. In this case, shame inhibits change and progress and thus blocks the mechanism of adaptation. This is a straightforward case in which shame is maladaptive. H  l  ne's situation is due to a combination of factors, but a crucial role is played by the belief that her failure to interact with her team cannot be corrected. Such belief can be socially induced and socially manipulated, in order to discourage the subject to engage in self-correction and self-development. In this case, shame works toward exclusion and marginalization.

Other cases of shame are harder to interpret as maladaptive in the same sense as Hélène's is. One of the most difficult cases to accommodate is submissive shame, e.g. victim shame. This is shame that occurs in subjects because they have been wronged. I shall use a literary case (g) *Disgrace* by John Maxwell Coetzee, because it well illustrates the complexity of the relation between victims and wrongdoers from a personal point of view.<sup>22</sup> Lucy is the victim of gang-rape and feels ashamed. Her shame is generated by the false socially induced belief that the victim causes the crime. She does not fully acknowledge that she is an innocent victim. Perhaps denial is defensive, since she knows that she has no chance to sustain and possibly win the moral trial. In some cases, the social pressure might be such that the victim's shame becomes a recalcitrant emotion, resisting the deep sense of having being wronged, and clashing with the resentment which appropriately attends the experience of being violated. Perpetrated against a lesbian and



independent woman such as Lucy, gang-rape is understood to be “corrective”: It is meant to teach a lesson and tell the small world of the district that Lucy is vulnerable and should keep her place in the established social order. Her feeling of shame exposes the extreme vulnerability of Lucy’s body, life, and fixes her place in the society. Corrective rape is meant to restore the social order that she had threatened, not because of what she did, but because of what she is and represents. Corrective rape is a double harm which adds to injury a profound sense of social displacement. It does so by expropriating Lucy’s basic modes of self-assessment, that is, shame. Lucy’s shame is maladaptive, but its most characteristic feature is that it is induced by an oppressive social and political structure which favors unequal relations and submissive attitudes. Rather than fulfilling its primary self-protecting function, in this case shame works toward alienation. It is not uncommon that submissive shame is paired with self-deception. One may self-deceivingly assume a wrongful stand (believing that she caused her own harm) is less painful and less discomfoting than representing oneself as a helpless victim, overpowered by the strong, at the mercy of others.

Coetzee’s novel allows the readers to observe the social practice of shaming and the phenomenology of shame at one remove, and from other perspectives. David criticizes Lucy for feeling ashamed and encourages her to acknowledge that she has being wronged. In dealing with Lucy’s shame, David also deals with his past wrongs and faces a different kind of shame, the wrongdoer’s shame. Both David and Lucy have hard time facing the real object of their shame. In both cases, shame is so strong that it precludes self-knowledge and hinders practical knowledge, that is, knowledge of what to do. Instead of apologizing for having wronged Soraya and Melanie, David renounces his agential autonomy and proclaims surrender. This is also the result of unbearable shame. In accounting for his past wrongs, David recognizes the decisive authority of desire and accords it priority over the dignity of others. This is clearly no moral justification: David was not merely overpowered by the brute force of desire, and now he takes the desire’s stand. Again, this sort of shame can coexist with self-deception. This self-representation as abiding by the major authority of desire may be less threatening than admitting the failure to be loved.

## 6. The Mirroring Effect

Submissive shame brings to light the bleak dynamic of power in personal relations, but these cases (g) do not challenge the hypothesis of social emotions as adaptive syndromes. On the contrary, they confirm that some cooperative schemes depend on the players’ loyalty associated to their distinctive roles and responsibilities. Not all cooperative schemes are morally valuable, even though they are functionally justifiable. For instance, agents can cooperate for the sake of an instrumental good that is morally objectionable or in order to bring about a morally good end whose realization needs a morally



bad end. Some cooperative schemes based on exploitation and submission may have been “adaptive” for some time. Lucy’s shame points to a failure to meet the normative standards of a cooperative scheme based on female submission and exploitation. That Lucy feels ashamed despite the fact that she is wronged indicates that she sees no option but to regard herself as a player in this scheme. By contrast, David encourages her not to feel shame indicates that he does not want to partake in a cooperative scheme that he finds morally wrong. David’s speech works toward Lucy’s emancipation and liberation, through liberation from shame.

Interestingly, in this case, liberation from shame is not necessarily conducive to reclaim one’s place in the cooperative scheme. It can challenge that scheme and calls for social change. As things stand, Lucy and her rapists do not disagree about the grounds of shame. David does, because he is not a member of that scheme. However, David’s change of mind and character throughout the novel also indicates that one is not determined by the social schemes of which one partakes. He makes some progress toward recognizing past wrongs, having previously denied his own responsibilities. Lucy’s shame makes him sensitive to the apparent yet unacknowledged reasons for being ashamed of his past and taking his responsibilities. This is a case in which the shame of others becomes a positive normative constraint, as through a mirroring effect. That is, somebody’s shame may function as a mirror of the agent’s own shame so as to reveal the reasons for being ashamed in full light.<sup>23</sup>

## 7. Shame and Public Standards

Shame is related to vulnerability in a more radical sense than current accounts acknowledge. Social animals are constitutively vulnerable to others, and we have developed a complex cluster of practical resources (e.g. capacities, strategies, and dispositions) to cope with vulnerability. Shame is one of such practical resource, operating at the agential and social levels, and its functions at these levels are coordinated and complementary.

At the agential level, shame performs self-monitoring and self-governing functions, in this way analogously to guilty feelings and self-blame. In deliberative contexts, shame is activated in order to negotiate boundaries of the self. Prospective shame blocks intentions and proposals of action that do not fit one’s expectations about oneself. This function may be invoked explicitly in practical reasoning, while forming future-directed intentions. It is on these occasions that agents respond to vulnerabilities that arise from their constitution. To explicate this function correctly, it is crucial that the gaze of others does not coincide merely with one’s own particular perspective. This is why the appeal to the *public* nature of standards is so important. The term public is not equivalent to “external to the subject” or “impersonal”. Public are those standards that anybody could accept, regardless of their particular interests, desires, or plans. Constraints and limitations are morally



and politically legitimate insofar as they are justified on the basis of public standards that rational agents could accept. Public standards are justified through a rational process in which the relevant agents relate to one another as co-legislators in a community governed by mutual respect and recognition, rather than as members or representatives of specific groups (Bagnoli 2007, Bagnoli 2017).

Induced shame performs a controlling function in a way analogous to reactive emotions such as blame and resentment. It is a tool for social control, and triggers fear of losing social status or being an outcast. In cooperative schemes, it may prove to be a kind of preemptive sanction more powerful than punishment, because it does not call into question only a specific performance but the agents' social status under particular descriptions, e.g. as citizens, fellows, relatives, players, members of the community. To this extent, shame is part of the emotional vocabulary governing membership in the relevant community. However, this characterization does not imply that shame is always heteronomous, nor that the criteria for shame are such that any form of shame is autonomous insofar as it is a first-personal attitude.<sup>24</sup> Rather, shame identifies specific vulnerabilities that are to be addressed from a normative perspective, in a general account of emotions as practical resources. When justified by public standards, shame works toward agential autonomy, precisely by imposing constraints on agency. In sum, the appeal to public standards of rational justification warrants a reliable and appropriate relation between emotional vulnerability and autonomy.

## Notes

- 1 Previous versions of this chapter have been presented at the Workshop on Affections at *The Oxford Research in the Humanities*, and at *Dutch Research School of Philosophy (OZSW)* Seminar hosted by the Erasmus University of Rotterdam, and at the *Swiss Center for Affective Sciences* at the University of Geneva in 2015. I would like to thank these audiences and, in particular, Jan Bransen, Patrick Delaere, Julien Deonna, Lorenzo Greco, Edward Harcourt, Katrien Schaubroek, Maureen Sie, and Fabrice Teroni. My deepest thanks to the editors of the volume.
- 2 I define “constitutive vulnerability” in contrast to “circumstantial vulnerability,” whether pathogenic or self-enhancing, in Bagnoli 2016. An alternative taxonomy of vulnerability is provided by Dodds, Mackenzie and Rogers 2013. On the relation between vulnerability and autonomy, see also Anderson 2013, and Mackenzie 2013.
- 3 This is partly because of a certain conception of emotions, the simple view, see Bagnoli 2011.
- 4 On some accounts, agential autonomy does not necessarily require rational deliberation: some actions may be autonomous because they are wholeheartedly endorsed, not because they represent the upshot of rational deliberation, see Frankfurt 1988.
- 5 I will assume the view without argument because I have defended it extensively elsewhere, see, e.g. Bagnoli 2007, 2016, and 2017.
- 6 Some philosophers treat human emotions as mixtures of some basic, primary prototype emotions; see Maibom (2010) for a recent restatement of this view.



In contrast to this view, I share Gibbard's view that "human life differs radically from the life of most animals, and requires such complex social dispositions that new emotions might have evolved" Gibbard 1990: 138.

- 7 On love and vulnerability, see Strahele 2016.
- 8 I am not denying the possibility that love may not be reciprocated, of course. It is certainly possible to love somebody without being loved, but this is not a case of a loving relation. Most accounts consider the threat of love to individual autonomy insofar as lovers are bound by mutual affection, reciprocal obligations and responsibilities. By contrast, I am focusing on loving relations in which love appears to represent a risk for agential autonomy.
- 9 On the ambivalences and risks of romantic love, see Baier 1991, Friedman 1998, Ben-Ze'ev and Goussinsky 2008, and Jónasdóttir 2011.
- 10 For instance, Baier writes: "Love is not just an emotion people feel toward other people, but also a complex tying together of the emotions that two or a few more people have; it is a special form of emotional interdependence" (Baier 1991: 444). Baier does not explain exactly what makes love special, but she remarks that love is "more than just the duplication of the emotion of each in a sympathetic echo in the other" (Baier 1991: 442). See also Friedman 1998, Kittay 1999, Butler 2008, Gregoratto 2017, and Jónasdóttir 2011.
- 11 "Human emotions are above all social. A person invariably depends on intricate systems of cooperation and reciprocity if he is to have any decent chance of survival, reproduction, and the fostering of his children. Negative human emotions respond preeminently to threats to one's place in cooperative schemes—or so we should expect" Gibbard 1990: 138.
- 12 The historical and dynamic character of love is first highlighted in Nozick 1974: 167–168. Nozick (1989) ties the historical structure of love to its object: Love is historical because it attaches to persons rather than to their characteristics.
- 13 On the relation between loss of a love and loss of identity, see Nussbaum 1990.
- 14 Attention is understood both in its cognitive and affective dimensions, and perhaps more importantly in its volitional one.
- 15 According to Beauvoir, love is grounded on reciprocal recognition of two freedoms, and allows for mutual self-enhancement and empowerment (2011: 723). Likewise, Honneth conceives of the positive aspects of love in terms of mutual recognition of vulnerability and neediness (Honneth 1995: 95; Honneth 2014: 141–42, 151). From a feminist perspective, Honneth's theory of recognition seems overly optimistic and oblivious of the ambivalences of love and its contamination with power (Butler 2008).
- 16 There is an extensive literature on the ambivalences of love and the dynamic of power, starting with Beauvoir 2011: 724–25, Benjamin 1980, 1994. Some ambivalences are captured in terms of dependence and inter-dependence (Baier 1991, Friedman 1998: 174, 177; Kittay 1999).
- 17 On shame as a basic mode of self-assessment see Taylor 1985, Tangney 2003.
- 18 This taxonomy has become current in recent literature on shame, see e.g. Mai-bom 2010. While I do not think that it is exhaustive or that it gives justice to more complex views such as Williams's (1993) and Deonna, Teroni, and Rodogno's (2011), it represents one shared way to distinguish heteronomous and autonomous conceptions of shame.
- 19 On the agent-centered view, it is necessary that those values be embraced by the person for her to be ashamed of not living up to them; while on the group-centered view, shame is regulated by public expectations. Rawls (1971), Kekes (1988), and Taylor (1985) are often cited as proponents of the first view (Moi-bom 2010, Velleman 2006: 47–48 n1).
- 20 "One can perceive through the shame resulting from the disapproval of *others whom one respects* (or even from merely being confronted with some example of



a standard immeasurably higher than one's own), not that one is failing to meet one's own current ideals, but rather that one should adopt new ones" (O'Hear 1977: 79).

- 21 On the relation between shame and moral progress, see O'Hear 1977, Kekes 1988, Calhoun 2004, and Deonna, Teroni, and Rodogno 2011.
- 22 For references to empirical data on shame, see Maibom 2010, Tangney and Fischer 1995, Tangney and Dearing 2002. Coetzee's story takes place in post-colonial South Africa, and it is susceptible to multiple layers of interpretations, see e.g. Kossew 2003. On the complexity of the characterizations of victims and wrongdoers, see the taxonomy provided in Elster 2004.
- 23 This should not be confused with the *beloved-induced shame*, which is shame caused by the beloved's misbehavior. Helm (2010) holds that in order to account for beloved-induced shame, we should deny the reflexivity of shame. By contrast, Jones (2012) develops an account of beloved-induced shame which preserves its reflexivity. Jones (2012) identifies two features of loving: evaluative dependence and a persistent tendency to believe in the beloved's moral goodness. These two features of loving explain how experiencing shame can be caused by the beloved's moral transgression. I agree that lovers are inclined to give their beloved the benefit of the doubt, but I do not think that the belief in the lover's goodness is a necessary feature of love. The phenomena relative to shame induced by the beloved's misconduct or wickedness can be explained otherwise, by the general tendency of social animals to feel vicarious emotions and the peculiar tendency of lovers to identify with their lover's perspective and destiny. In any case, I defend the view that shame is a basic mode of self-assessment, and to function this way it must be reflective and self-conscious; see also Tangney 1999, 2003.
- 24 The latter view is suggested in Deonna, Teroni, and Rodogno 2011.

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# Contributors

**Carla Bagnoli** is a professor of philosophy at the University of Modena, and Professor II at the University of Oslo. In addition to articles in ethics, Bagnoli has published three monographs in Italian and is the editor of *Morality and the Emotions* (Oxford University Press, 2011) and *Constructivism in Ethics* (Cambridge University Press, 2013).

**Sandrine Bergès** is an associate professor in philosophy at Bilkent University in Ankara. Her books include: *The Routledge Companion to Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and *A Feminist Perspective on Virtue Ethics*. She also co-edited *The Social and Political Philosophy of Mary Wollstonecraft* (with Alan Coffee).

**Andreas Blank** is a Lise Meitner Research Fellow at the University of Klagenfurt, Austria. He is the author of some 60 articles on early modern and early analytic philosophy.

**Alan Coffee** teaches Ethics and Human Values at King's College London. He is the co-editor, with Sandrine Bergès, of *The Social and Political Philosophy of Mary Wollstonecraft* (Oxford University Press, 2016) and, with Sandrine Bergès and Eileen Hunt Botting, *The Wollstonecraftian Mind* (Routledge, forthcoming).

**Patrick Fessenbecker** is currently a postdoctoral fellow at the Center for Uses of Literature at Southern Denmark University, on leave from his position as Assistant Professor in the Program for Cultures, Civilizations, and Ideas at Bilkent University. He is the author of a number of essays on literature and philosophy, including, most recently, "Sympathy, Vocation, and Moral Deliberation in George Eliot" in *English Literary History*.

**Hatice Karaman** is a PhD student in the Department of Philosophy at Yeditepe University. She has an MA in English literature and a BA in comparative literature. She previously published "The Mother, Who Is Not One: Reflections of Motherhood in Shakespeare's *Romeo And Juliet*, *The Tempest*, and *The Taming of the Shrew*" in *Gender Studies* (2015).

**Julia Leri** is a trained philosophy teacher and works as a project coordinator at the "Center for the *History of Women Philosophers and Scientists*"



at Paderborn University, Germany. In her research, she focuses on making Hildegard von Bingen's rich corpus accessible to students of philosophy and implement her philosophical ideas into the philosophy curricula.

**Martine Prange** holds the chair of Philosophy of Humanity, Culture and Society at the Department of Philosophy, Tilburg University (the Netherlands). Her expertises are continental philosophy and the philosophy of sports. She has published, among others, the book *Vrouwenvoetbal in Nederland* (edited with Martijn Oosterbaan; Klement, 2017) on women's football in the Netherlands, and *Nietzsche, Wagner, Europe* (De Gruyter, 2013).

**Martina Reuter** is a senior lecturer in gender studies at the University of Jyväskylä. She received her doctorate in philosophy at the University of Helsinki (2000) and has published articles and book chapters on Mary Wollstonecraft's moral philosophy, on the feminism of François Poulain de la Barre, on feminist interpretations of the history of philosophy, and on phenomenology.

**Daniela Ringkamp** is a scientific assistant at the University of Magdeburg/Germany, where she is also coordinator of the Human Rights Center. Her research mainly focuses on medical ethics, especially ethics of dementia, and the philosophy of human rights. Among others, she has published the volume *Dementia and Subjectivity: Aesthetic, Literary and Philosophical Perspectives* (together with Sara Strauß and Leonie Süwolto).

**Alberto L. Siani** is a senior researcher of Aesthetics at the Department of Civilizations and Forms of Knowledge at Università di Pisa, after being an associate professor of philosophy at Yeditepe University, Istanbul. Among others, he has published *Morte dell'arte, libertà del soggetto: Attualità di Hegel* (2017) and edited *L'estetica di Hegel* (2014, with Mario Farina).

**Fiona Tomkinson** is an associate professor in the Graduate School of Humanities at Nagoya University, Japan. She was previously an associate professor at Yeditepe University, where she taught in the English Language and Literature and Philosophy Departments from 1997 to 2017. She has published widely in the fields of literature and philosophy.

**Mary Ellen Waithe** is Professor Emerita at Cleveland State University, editor of the four-volume series *A History of Women Philosophers*, co-translator of Oliva Sabuco's 1587 work *Nueva Filosofía de la Naturaleza del Hombre*, and author of dozens of journal articles, book chapters, and conference presentations about women philosophers and bioethics.



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